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A ROMANCE OF JAMAICA

BY
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"The Rat Trap," "Captain Amyas," Etc.

"I have been in the Country that is called *Look Behind!*"

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The First Year

CHAPTER I

"Yet Earth saw one thing—one, how fair!
One grace that grew to its full on Earth;
Smiles might be rare on her cheek so spare,
And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
But she had her great gold hair."

ROBERT BROWNING.

WHEN God had finished writing the Commandments, the Devil came and read them through.

"Very nice," he said. "Very nice, indeed! But I will add one more, and I undertake that so long as a man keeps that one, he may break all the others with impunity—on earth. My offer does not hold good for another world, of course."

Then, after the others, he added the Eleventh Commandment:

"Thou shalt not be FOUND OUT."

And ever since then men have found the Devil's statement perfectly true; but by reason of their frailty and the Satanic sense of humour, they have also found that the Eleventh Commandment is harder to keep than all the rest of the Decalogue, and that its originator places traps for the unwary who neglect his particular law. He has no simpler pitfall than an Open Window, though his vengeance upon the law-

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breaker sometimes seems oblique in its results, and includes the unhappiness of an innocent eavesdropper.

Hot climates are peculiarly adapted to the trap of the Open Window, and the Tropics are the Devil's own hunting ground for more reasons than their lack of house privacy. It was, indeed, difficult not to hear too much in the old Myrtle Bank Hotel, at Kingston, Jamaica, where the drawing room was chiefly composed of entrances and exits, and outside on the verandah people sat and talked regardless of the unwilling listeners within. Gossip, however, is so inevitable that to the habitués a shrug of the shoulder is its only acknowledgment. Everybody talks scandal in Kingston, and if your character is blackened you have the revenge of knowing that the traducers have lost theirs five minutes before, or will do so five minutes after.

On a certain Friday morning during a West Indian season, before the earthquake which demolished the old Myrtle Bank, a lady sat writing letters at one of the little writing tables just inside those open windows which led on to the verandahs. She was a stranger to the place, and had only just arrived in the Hotel, for the Mail was late. The drawing room was empty save for herself, and she fancied innocently that most of the people staying at Myrtle Bank must be breakfasting, knowing nothing of the straggling meal hours and the sorrows of the waiters. For if you did not breakfast at seven at Myrtle Bank, it probably meant that you had taken advantage of the cool to go out first, and would demand ice water and king fish at ten; and between those hours the tables eternally filled and emptied themselves by twos and threes, and the mournful American voices rang through the coffee room without ceasing. But Mrs. Hillier had breakfasted on board, and had not looked about her as she made her way to the drawing room and sat down to the writing table against the small space of wall be-

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tween two windows. She was not an observant woman at this point of her life, and the extreme novelty of all the sights and sounds around her bewildered her brain. Born and bred in the conventional circle of English home life, the strangeness of the first foreign land she had ever seen was absolutely painful to her. Even her husband, to whom she was writing, seemed a desirable friend to her at the present moment, and she longed for his presence. And yet all through the voyage she had been dreading . . . dreading . . .

Outside the window, on the verandah, a lady in a red frock was rocking lazily in an American chair, and idly turning the pages of an American paper. Most things are American in Jamaica, except the government, which is over-officialled with Englishmen to run the Island for tourists from the States. To the lady in red arrived a lady in white, who dropped into another chair, and said "Had your smoke?"

"No—I've told the boy to bring me some cigarettes out here. Where's the Smith man?"

"Still feeding. He'll come presently."

Inside the drawing room Mrs. Hillier did not notice the voices because she was finding her note somewhat of a difficulty. She wrote slowly, and with pauses between the stilted sentences.

"My dear Eric—

"You will be surprised to see that I am already in Jamaica, after arranging to come by the next Mail. An old school friend, Eleanor Honouram, was coming by this boat, and Mr. Burnett thought it would be nice for us to travel together. She was to have joined her uncle at a place called Mafoota. The climate was thought to be the one chance for Eleanor, who had a chest disease. She came on board with me, and grew rapidly worse on the voyage, and died two days before

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we reached Turk's Island. It has been a great shock to me, and a very trying time. I am writing to her uncle to break this unhappy news to him, and shall send all her belongings to Mafoota. I hope that my arrival will not inconvenience you. Of course I do not know your plans, but I imagine you are still in St. Thomas, looking after the sugar estate. If it is possible for me to join you, and you desire it, please send me directions."

The pen seemed to stiffen in Mrs. Hillier's hand, and she hesitated. She had been going to say that she wished to do whatever he thought best—the proper and conventional acquiescence for her wifehood of four months. But she hated a lie, and her heart stood still, appalled, at the secret dread of that meeting. . . .

Outside on the verandah the red and white ladies had been joined by the tardy Smith, who, seated between them, began to regale them with news gathered since yesterday. Inside at the writing table Mrs. Hillier, trying to write her lie, paused and heard the voices plainly for the first time.

"Is Eric Hillier still at Constant Spring?"

"You had better ask if Mrs. Odell is still there! The one implies the other. I was having tea up there on Thursday, and they were in the hall—she does make an absolute fool of him!"

"Does she?" said another woman's voice. "I don't know—I think he gets as much as he gives! They are notorious all over Jamaica. Did you hear that they went to the Blue Mountains as Mr. and Mrs. Hillier? It's a fact. I know some one who was staying up there, and they had the same room!"

"I thought," said a man's deeper tones, "that he went with the King's House party?"

"No—he was staying at the King's House when he first

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came back from St. Thomas, but that's more than a month ago. Then this Mrs. Odell turned up (she was an old friend of his in India—the affair was not too respectable there!) and Hillier was so constantly at Constant Spring that report says the Governor suggested at last that he should remove himself there altogether! Hillier and the Odell woman have gone about with each other openly ever since."

Mrs. Hillier still held the pen in her hand, and idly traced words on the blotting pad. Her eyes stared curiously at the laboriously written page before her—the half apologetic explanation, the meek request for orders as to where she should go to meet this man—her husband!—of whom they spoke outside the open windows. There was no alteration of her attitude or face, but the latter was curiously expressionless at all times. The black boy, crossing the room with the cigarettes ordered by the lady in red, caught sight of Mrs. Hillier at the writing table, and loitered a minute, looking at her with some interest. Her back was towards him, and he saw nothing but a rather slight figure with narrow shoulders, and a head crowned with really beautiful hair. It was so absolutely golden, and the bright plaits promised such abundance, that the Negro was excited to admiration. A moment later, however, he saw her face, and passed on, disappointed. It was not that she was exactly plain, but the small features and colourless skin were utterly uninteresting. There was not even an expression of anger or grief in the bluish-grey eyes, though it might readily have been brought there by the shock which she had really undergone from the gossip just overheard. She was quite a young woman—hardly more than a girl—and her whole face and figure were so undeveloped by any experience of life that other people besides the waiter had pronounced her dull and very uninteresting. She had never missed attention, however, because it had never occurred to her to demand it; and since

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her marriage she would have regarded admiration other than her husband's as illegal, while to excite his approval meant a nameless horror. . . .

The topic of discussion outside the windows had altered, but Mrs. Hillier was already the Devil's innocent instrument for the punishment of his lawbreaker. She looked at her letter to her husband again, and quietly tore it into many fragments. Then she took a fresh sheet of paper and began to write, this time with ease and rapidity.

"I have come out by the Mail before that which we arranged, because a school friend of mine was coming, and my guardian thought it better for me to travel with her. Her name was Eleanor Honouram, and she was going to an uncle in the interior of Jamaica, in the hope of the climate curing a lung trouble which she had. But she grew rapidly worse on the voyage, and died before we reached land. I came here alone, and had not been an hour in the Hotel before I learned by chance of the way in which you are disgracing yourself—and me. I thought you were in St. Thomas, looking after our joint property, for which ostensible reason you came to Jamaica, and I was to join you. I see now why you put off my coming out to you, and your real reason for staying here. Of the woman who lives with you as your wife I have nothing to say—save that I, who *am* your wife, pity her from the depths of my heart. But for you, I think you a coward and a criminal, and I will have nothing more to do with you from this time forth. I am going to my friend's uncle to tell him of her death, and to place myself under his protection until I decide what to do. I shall leave you to write to my guardian and explain things as you can. The disposal of the property about which you are supposed to be out here I leave to you also. By the time you receive this I shall have left Kingston.

"Ellice Hillier."

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She addressed the letter to "Eric Hillier, Esq., Constant Spring Hotel," and left the drawing room as quietly as she had entered it, with the missive in her hand. There was no flush on her face or excitement in her manner, but someone passing her on the broad staircase noticed her sufficiently to think that she looked as if she had a bad headache. There was a curious little line of pain between her brows, and blue shadows beneath the dull eyes. As she stepped quietly into the hall she found that it was crowded with well-dressed black people—men in flannel coats and straw hats, and women in muslins—the dark faces making Mrs. Hillier shrink with an accession of fear and the sense of loneliness. People were chattering and talking loudly, numbers of white-clad waiters hurrying to and fro, the European and American visitors having buggies called for them, and mingling carelessly with the black people. Mrs. Hillier saw her own boxes and those of her dead friend piled up in the hall, and noticed vaguely that the initials were the same—E. H. in both cases. It was almost impossible, even for her, to distinguish which were hers and which Eleanor's.

As she passed the Office a bland voice called to her, and she saw the neat, coloured clerk holding out an envelope, with the irreproachable courtesy of a trained manner. Mrs. Hillier went up to the counter where lies the open visitors' book, and took the letter before she saw that it was addressed to Miss Honouram.

"It is not for—" she began, and then, glancing down at the freshly written names in the book, she saw that the same mistake had occurred there. She was evidently entered as Miss Honouram instead of Mrs. Hillier, and she hugged the alias with a feeling of momentary relief that no one need know that she was Mrs. Eric Hillier—the woman whose husband was living with someone else in the same town. The few people she had known on the boat, she remembered, had gone up to

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Constant Spring. No one, for a few hours at least, was likely to recognise her here, or proclaim her identity.

"Thank you!" she said gravely, then with an effort she lingered to ask about the means of getting to Mafoota?

"Where, please?" asked the clerk, and on her repeating the name, he referred to a great map, and informed her that the place was not on the railway, but she would have to go up to Montpelier and then drive. It was a six hours' journey by rail, and the train started at 10.15 the next morning.

"Thank you," Ellice said again, and turned away, still holding her letter to her husband and that other addressed to "Miss Honouram."

If she must stay in Kingston for the night, she would not post the letter to-day and risk his knowing of her presence before she was gone. It flashed across her memory, however, that in one of his first letters from Jamaica Eric had mentioned a man who acted as his agent in Kingston—a storekeeper—to whom she might go in her character of Eleanor Honouram and ask for direct news of her friend's husband. Suppose that the voices on the verandah had lied, or at least exaggerated? Deep down in Mrs. Hillier's heart, so deep that she need not acknowledge it even to herself, was a sudden pang lest this should be the case—a pang not of hope, but of fear! Beneath all her crude denunciation of him, and her outraged sense of decency, there had been a relief so impossible to admit that she would not allow herself to think of it. But it was there, just as all through the voyage she had been conscious of a nightmare of dread that she had schooled herself never to betray even to her dying friend. Eric by his own action had given her a chance of liberty—she need not go back to him and make the best of married life, as she had honestly meant to do, but which nevertheless was an appalling destiny as seen through her brief remembrance of it. She had never realised,

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until she had forfeited her right to be a girl, how much the liberty of girlhood had meant. And now it seemed once more within her grasp.

Someone said to her, "Buggy, please?" and she answered hastily, "Yes!" waking to the fact that her aimless attitude in the vestibule of the hotel was causing people to look at her wonderingly. One of the carriages waiting in the courtyard drew up at the stepping-stone, the porter helped her in, and asked where the driver should go.

"Do you know a storekeeper named Babbington?" she asked in desperation.

"The bookseller in Harbour Street?" said the driver, more to the porter than to Ellice, and hardly waiting for an affirmative whipped up his lean pony and rattled out of the big gates into the dusty road. It was, even now, only half past ten in the morning, but the day seemed weary with heat. The rains were a month or two ahead, for the New Year had only begun, and the ugly Colonial seaport would have been a dismay to Mrs. Hillier under any circumstances. Even in her self-absorption over the turn which her fortune seemed to have taken in one brief hour, she noticed her surroundings with faint distaste—the shoddy treeless streets, white with dust and smelling of last week's refuse, the slipshod stores, the insolent black people laughing and talking at the top of their voices, and hardly moving out of the way for a white woman. The trams jingled by, half filled already, and other buggies passed her with faded faces under the sun hats. It was a bad dream of slack rule in a colony that seemed visibly slipping downhill for lack of prosperity. Everything was second-rate—the white population included—and law and order were miles across the sea in cool, tidy England.

The buggy drew up at a big newsvendor's store, and Ellice alighted without dismissing it. She should only be a few

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minutes, she said, and the driver could take her back to Myrtle Bank. His charge? Three shillings an hour. Very well. She looked round her furtively as she entered the grateful dusk of the store and asked in a low voice for the proprietor.

Mr. Babbington had just arrived, the shopman informed her, and was in his office. Ellice followed her guide—whose complexion she was later on to recognise as “snuff and butter”—through piles of newly arrived colonial editions, to the little counting house at the back of the shop, where an elderly man with grey hair came forward to meet her. He was thin and grave, and frankly white, for which she thanked Heaven. Already the sly courtesy of the educated Negro had begun to fill her with instinctive distrust, though she had not by many stages reached the resident White’s racial hatred of the resident Black, nor did she know the significance of the term “Colour.” Mr. Babbington was a Creole, which does *not* infer a mixture of blood, but merely implies birth in the Island, and the nails on the hand with which he placed a chair for Ellice were as uncontrovertible as her own.

“What can I do for you?” he said pleasantly, his quiet eyes taking in the insignificant face and figure of the lady before him. Mrs. Hillier had removed her gloves in the buggy and slipped the wedding ring from her left hand. Her fingers lay in her lap, innocent of adornment, for Mr. Babbington to see.

“I think you act as Agent for a Mr. Eric Hillier?” said Ellice clearly. The self-possession of her own manner surprised her, for she had hardly decided what she would say as yet.

“Yes, I am Mr. Hillier’s Agent when he is away on business; at present, however, he is in Kingston.”

“I know—at the Constant Spring Hotel?”

“Yes.”

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"I travelled out with a relative of his," said Ellice deliberately, after a moment's hesitation for the form of words. If, as seemed probable to her exaggerated sense of outrage, Hillier was posing as an unmarried man, she did not wish to inform Mr. Babbington of a wife's existence unless forced to do so. "Unfortunately she was an invalid, and became much worse on the voyage." (The narrow lips had been conventionally trained not to lie, but they did not falter over this first essay. She spoke with just the regret she fancied Eleanor might have used—just the regret she would have used to Eleanor's uncle.) "I am sorry to have bad news for Mr. Hillier—"

"The lady is not dead?"

"She died before we reached Turk's Island."

"Pardon me, does Mr. Hillier know that you were travelling with his relative?"

"No, it was arranged at the last minute. Mrs. Hillier—the lady was a Mrs. Hillier—placed all her possessions in my keeping and asked me to inform her—cousin. But I am leaving Kingston to-morrow, and as I shall not have time to see Mr. Hillier I thought my best plan was to leave the matter in your hands."

"You wish me to inform Mr. Hillier of his relative's death? It would be possible for you to telephone to Constant Spring and for him to come in this afternoon, I think."

For a minute Ellice's heart seemed to stand still. All the dread of the voyage that lay behind that secret relief of this morning rushed back upon her. She felt her lips stiffen, but the emotionless face did not change.

"I would rather not meet Mr. Hillier," she said in a hard voice. "In fact I must ask you not to communicate with him until I have left, or if you do so to explain that business will prevent my having a personal interview. I have ascertained"—the voice became slower, colder than before—"that he is

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at present much engaged with a lady staying at the Constant Spring Hotel. Is that so?"

Mr. Babbington's inscrutable eyes met the indifference of her own, as if he were merely reticent for his client.

"May I ask on what ground you put the question?"

"If what I hear is correct I do not care to meet Mr. Hillier on account of my dead friend," said Ellice, measuring her words. "I am not asking information of you—merely affirmation. There is a lady staying at the Constant Spring Hotel named Mrs. Odell?"

"Certainly."

"Her name is coupled with Mr. Hillier's? They are—together?"

Mr. Babbington smiled slightly for the first time, and shrugged his shoulders. "I do not join in the Kingston gossip, Madam!" he said. "May I ask what were the relations between Mr. and—Mrs. Hillier, in my turn?"

"She was his wife!" said Ellice, driven to bay. "You did not know that she was coming out to join him?"

A slight change crossed the storekeeper's face. "No, I did not know that," he said. Then more frankly: "I will tell you the facts as far as rumour knows them, but I must ask you to remember that this is a very scandalous place, and that the most innocent situations are exaggerated into crimes. Mr. Hillier met by chance an old acquaintance of his—Mrs. Odell—who had, I hear, a great influence over him years since. Unfortunately (as you tell me that he was married) the influence reasserted itself when they met. It is simply a case of infatuation—Mr. Hillier is bound in the toils of Mrs. Odell's fascinations, and the fact is so patent that people talk."

"Under the circumstances," said Ellice slowly, as she rose, "it seems to me a fortunate coincidence that his wife—died!"

"Very fortunate—as you say."

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"Can I trust you to inform Mr. Hillier of his happy release—after I have left Kingston?"

"If you wish it."

"And I think," said Ellice still slowly as she turned away, "that there is no necessity to mention to any one whom Mr. Hillier knows in Jamaica that he ever was married. I presume that no one knows it?"

"Not to my knowledge—I did not, at any rate."

"Then we can keep it to ourselves, as you and I seem to be the only people besides Mr. Hillier himself, who do know."

"It is a generous decision, Madam!"

She looked at him a trifle curiously, and with a brief bend of her head and a murmured "Good morning!" she went out of the store. Mr. Babbington's eyes followed her white figure until it passed into the sunlight of the street; then he walked into the front of the shop himself, and spoke to one of the dusky salesmen.

"I am glad to see you back again, Woods. You landed yesterday, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I was waiting to see you about the consignment from England."

"Ah, very well. Come into my office."

He did not say anything further until his travelling clerk was safely out of hearing of his associates, when he turned to him and spoke carelessly.

"Did you notice the lady who has just gone out, Woods? She was a fellow passenger of yours on the Mail, I believe."

"Yes, sir. I know her face. She was travelling with a poor lady who died at sea."

"Do you happen to know her name?"

"The dead lady, sir? She was a Miss Honouram."

"Ah! . . . And the lady who went out just now?"

"Mrs. Hillier, I believe, sir."

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"She came to me on business," said Mr. Babbington, in the same careless tone. "I did not catch her name. You are sure it was Mrs. Hillier?"

"Quite sure, sir."

Mr. Babbington made a note on a loose sheet of paper, as if to file the name for reference, while he mused a minute. The thing he had half suspected was confirmed. For the educated Native does not make mistakes as to faces or names, and his intelligence is a great deal sharper—not to say more cunning—than the ordinary white shop boy. Mr. Babbington might not have trusted Woods' discretion with regard to Mrs. Hillier's secret; but he had absolute confidence in his recognition of her. He kept his clerk with him, talking of the business on which he had just returned from Barbadoes, and by the time he returned to his associates Mrs. Hillier was safely out of sight and—as the storekeeper judged—had faded from Woods' memory. Then Mr. Babbington sat down and considered the position.—

Ellice had, in the mean time, found the buggy outside in the street, waiting her pleasure, and told the man to drive her back to the Hotel. There was no surprise in her mind at the confirmation she had received—confirmation, that is, of the view of the situation in which she honestly believed, though she had shrunk from actual sordid details of the affair, and had only Mr. Babbington's vague assertion of an "infatuation." The extreme and untried youth in Ellice Hillier forbade her to go cautiously or to weigh with deliberate judgment the case for and against her husband. She condemned him at once, and, to say truth, with inclination. The relief of this morning was a little more defined and less thrust into the background, when she arrived once more at the Hotel.

She had tried to eat lunch in the noisy, echoing coffee room, and found that her dry throat refused to swallow the fare

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provided, before she remembered the letter addressed to Eleanor Honouram in her possession. She carried it up to the room they had allotted to her, and sitting down on the narrow bed looked at the unopened envelope. To readsome one else's letter seemed to Ellice Hillier a dishonourable action, even though the real owner was dead. She turned it restlessly in her small hands, and gasped in the fiery atmosphere of the room, half with desperation, half with the revolt of English senses to the midday blaze of the tropics. Outside the uselessly open window a group of palms glittered in the still light, their fans reflecting heat; there was a little wooden hut on four wooden feet, and a strip of fence to fill in the landscape. Ellice stared at it all with homesick eyes. She yearned back to England with its cold conventionality, for a minute, and then, remembering how certain of its backgrounds were associated with her marriage, she shivered as if even the palms were more friendly.

She had a bald history. An orphan from birth, her upbringing had fallen to distant cousins, elderly women trained in traditions as firmly rooted as the century oaks in English soil. They had made her on a pattern of English maidenhood which is not yet quite worn out, the only divergence from the training of former generations being a modern attention to health which has resulted in less needlework and more games. Ellice had not even had the chance of rubbing shoulders with the world which school-life gives, and had been educated at home, her companionship with other girls lacking the confidences which she might elsewhere have exchanged. There had been little or no male element in her life save that of her elderly guardian—the Mr. Burnett referred to in her first letter to her husband—and Eric Hillier himself. He was a third cousin, and the most romantic figure in Ellice's life, though she saw him but seldom. A bachelor, well enough off to do as he

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pleased, Eric Hillier had sauntered round the globe, and if he found mischief for his idle hands to do had the wit to keep it to himself. His relations in England knew nothing to his discredit unless the vague term "a man of the world" as applied to him could be so translated. When Ellice came of age and inherited property substantial enough to entitle her to be called an heiress, Mr. Hillier had returned to England from "doing" Canada, and the cousins met again. Probably his experiences in distant lands caused Eric to look upon the bandbox existence which had fallen to Ellice as the best training for a wife; at any rate his lukewarm cousinship towards the conventional young lady in her conventional circle became marked attention, and the family saw reason to approve. Ellice approved also, because she had been taught that the happiest lot of woman is marriage, and that it was the most ladylike thing a girl could do to be a bride as soon as she left the schoolroom. So these two were married, and Mrs. Eric Hillier placidly changed her bridal satin for a correct grey cloth travelling dress, and took train with her husband for a week or so in Devonshire.

Eric Hillier had been a pleasant but strictly moderate wooer. He had been secretly amused and rather pleased at the real innocence of his fiancée's mind, which he was clever enough to recognise. He had not thought that it was possible nowadays for a girl to be as amazingly ignorant as Ellice; but he had lost touch with his country and its traditions in his wanderings abroad. Ellice had blushed a little when he kissed her smooth pale cheek, or put his arm round her waist, and the fact that such tepid caresses caused her heart to beat quicker with a faint sense of uneasiness would really have seemed impossible to Eric. His own view of love-making was so very different. But both indifference and the fact that business distracted him a good deal during his brief engagement, limited

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his ardour, and Ellice, though she found his embrace embarrassing, schooled herself to take it as a matter of course—as a nice modest girl should do. It was absurd to protest; husbands always kissed their wives—and her creed included the most absolute acceptance of all burdens laid by the husband on the wife.

Poor little ignorant, undeveloped girl! Her womanhood was so unknown to her, and her mind so that of a child, that the honeymoon was nothing but a nightmare. The elderly cousins would have thought it indecent to break any of the customs of marriage to her, but they sent her away in her husband's keeping with no remorse that the indecencies were there to face, and that she should meet them with the shock of being quite unprepared. The very quality of Eric's kisses was changed—they were no longer the affectionate demonstration that a brother might give a sister. He was neither a brute nor a sensualist; but he was an ordinary man in the vigour of his manhood, and having married a young wife and with time to spare for her, he made love as any other husband would have done. . . . In the Bluebeard's closet of her memory Ellice Hillier kept a picture of a large old-fashioned room in a country inn in distant Devonshire. It was early Autumn and a chilly night, and there was a fire. The light danced on the chintz curtains of the four-posted bed, and about the room, showing the horridly familiar juxtaposition of their joint luggage. And then she saw her husband's face. . . . She had not cried, or turned faint or protested. A woman with every sense of modesty legally outraged does not do that. She had agreed to accept marriage and had always in her own mind included any experience which might come with it. That it had been an unfair bargain, because she could have no least conception of the relations between the sexes, could not now be helped. She submitted to being married, and locked all exclamation

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against its experiences within her heart—the more so because she felt it hideous. Providence favoured the young couple, from the conventional view of Providence and its duties. The weather was mild for the season, and the country a beautiful setting to the picture of their bliss; there was nothing on earth to do but enjoy each other's society, and Eric Hillier, if he yawned, at least made up for it according to his own standard by the caresses he bestowed upon his perfectly compliant wife. Ellice never shrank—she would have died rather than own the shame that possessed her; but in her heart she felt that she had been outraged.

At the end of a week came a letter that cut short the bride's secret tortures and the bridegroom's growing boredom. It was in reference to the very property which Hillier was supposed to be managing in Jamaica, and the inspection of which took him to the West Indies at once. Ellice was to follow him, if he found a possible habitation for a wife in the unknown Island, and the interrupted honeymoon could be finished abroad. In the mean time the girl returned to her former guardian and relations, outwardly unchanged, inwardly never to be quite the same. While she bore an expected face before them all—regret for her husband's departure, anticipation in joining him—she knew that she had a secret from them, the secret of knowing her marriage a dreadful thing to her shrinking consciousness. When Eric had gone and the months passed smoothly on, she would fain have snatched them back lest they should bring her and her husband together again. She had no least spark of love for him, and her liking before marriage had been frightened out of her. She could not remember Eric save as the man whose passion had been a sickening revelation. Possibly in time she might have worn the fine edge off her susceptibilities, and have gone on with the decent outward show of life—never loving her husband, but allowing the man to suffer for no want

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in her as far as human nature could contrive it. English women are more often the martyrs to passion than the slaves of it.

But now had come this unexpected release. Mrs. Hillier clasped her small hands and gasped again as she remembered the effort it had caused her to take ship and join her husband the week before they had arranged her coming. Her guardian had not liked her travelling alone, even with her married name as a protection, and she had agreed to joining Eleanor Honouram with a reluctance that no one in the least suspected. Eric had not been ready for her before (she guessed the ugly reason now) and she wondered a little that he had so late lingered on in Kingston, knowing that she supposed him up country, and risked the gossip that might reach her on her arrival. Perhaps he had grown so reckless that he did not care—perhaps he had meant to leave just before her boat got in and meet her in the interior as though Mrs. Odell had never existed; perhaps—Oh, what did it matter! She had found him out by the merest chance, and would make her escape to-morrow. He was no longer the husband with a right over her that she could not contest; he had forfeited his right, and she was—thankful! Her dull eyes, staring at the bright-leaved palms, saw again the fire-lit room in Devonshire, and what had lain beyond. . . .

Because the thought was intolerable she turned at last to the letter and opened it with an impulse to distract herself. It was written in a large scrawly hand, that filled the sheets though the matter was brief.

“Mafoota, Jan. 14.

“My dear Ellie:—

“Though I haven’t seen you since you were a little girl, I’m writing to say how glad I shall be to have you with me,

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and I hope you won't feel a stranger to your old uncle. I am sorry I couldn't come through to Kingston and bring you up, but the stock takes up all my time just now, as we are breeding mules. I hope you'll come straight on to-morrow, and though it's a long journey you can't lose your way. Take the morning train that comes right through and book yourself to Montpelier. You'll get there at 4.30, and I'll send over Jersey King (my bookkeeper) with a buggy, to meet you and bring you on. It's an hour's drive when the roads are good and the mules fresh, and it may take longer; but you'll be safe here before dark. I am looking forward to having you as a companion, my dear, for I'm a lonely man, and you're the only blood kin I've got, except your aunt and sister. It's rough up country—don't expect it to be like England—but I think you'll like the Penn, and the climate is the best God ever made.

“Good-bye till to-morrow, little girl.

“Your affectionate Uncle,

“Richard Pryce.”

The kindly unconventional letter fluttered and lay still in Ellice Hillier's hands, as for the first time she began to think of her dead friend and the news she had to break to this stranger who was bidding her welcome. She fancied him a big, red-faced man, rather like an English farmer in appearance (her one idea of rural occupation being always connected with natty gaiters and a coloured tie—the John Bull type of rusticity as one sees it still in country towns on market day), and she wished with a lonely heart that the letter had really been written to her, the protection of Mafoota offered to, instead of asked by, one who had no claim. In a shy fashion, too, the very diminutive of her friend's name seemed a friendly thing—“Ellie.” Ellice had never been called so, though she had as

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much right to it as an Eleanor or Ellen. She pitied the Richard Pryce of the letter who was to be disappointed of his companion, and envied the poor dead girl who should have travelled to Mafoota in her place. Yet she was glad she had read the missive—it had somehow endowed Mr. Pryce with a personality, and made her feel secure in her demand upon his protection. The man who wrote so would not refuse her the shelter of his roof, even though she brought him the disappointment of ill news, and herself as a substitute for the niece he was expecting.

Another meal in the big echoing room downstairs ended the interminable day. Ellice was beginning to feel a furtiveness grow upon her—the fear that Mr. Babbington might not attend to her wishes, and might after all inform Eric of her presence in Kingston before she could escape. She hurried up to her room again as soon as possible, and locked the door, sitting idle in the hot darkness until she thought it likely that she could sleep. But the heat and the excitement of the day made her restless, and for hours she tossed to and fro under the mosquito net, listening to the sounds of the hotel and the rush of the trams, and longing for the morrow. Already the name of Mafoota was becoming that of a haven of refuge to her, and an unimaginable promised land. When at last she fell into a light, broken sleep, it haunted her dreams, and was always the place of safety towards which she was striving from an unknown danger. A name that meant nothing definite to her—a place she could not conjecture—but with some vague sweetness and assurance in it to her hunted senses. It was the last word on her lips as she drifted into sleep, and she said it as if it were a blessing:

“Mafoota!”

CHAPTER II

"You have much gold upon your head—
Buy from us with a golden curl!"

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IF I wanted to take the shortest cut to Mafoota, and could make my way as the crow flies, I should leave the railway at Appleton, and go up through the Country that is known by the name of *Look Behind*; and from thence I should pass by the Cockpit, which is the eighth wonder of the world, and beyond finite intelligence to understand. The train skirts the Cockpit, but the heart of it is unexplored, and not to be cultivated even by the Negro, who knows that if he plants banana and sits down to eat stolen yam to-day, the climate and the soil of Jamaica will do the rest in most parts of the Island, and he will have banana for his food on the morrow. But the great Pits, full of scornful vegetation, defy even the Negro, and are mysteries of God and Nature, only to be explained by the fact that mere beauty is never waste, and that occasionally the Almighty, Who gave all Earth to man, laughs through primeval tangles at his discomfiture. No one lives in the Cockpit country, because it is as a dozen craters of Etna, full of greenery from its precipitous heights to its deep ravines, save where wall over wall of grey rock refuses even the wild vines a roothold, and only the engineers who cut their respectful way through its borders have the right to speak of its power and beauty.

Beyond the Cockpit civilization straggles back into the hills, and there I would bear to the left, past Mount Rees and the

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Sinks, until on the slope of the low mountain chain I flew fair into Mafoota—the old stone house with its broad verandahs overlooking Anchovy Gully, and flinging a far view to Montpelier and Shettlewood. All across the Great River the land falls rather than rises, and behind Shettlewood the hills gather again and the prospect closes, green beyond green, velvet slope on velvet slope, all backed by blue and white morning sky, or a flame of sunset, the colours of the prism.

But Ellice had no wings, though her will might outrace her tardy limbs; and so she had need to go all the way by train, through Glencoe and Belfont, skirting the Cockpit, up to Cambridge, and so to Montpelier. The day rounded from heat to heat, and the train toiled up the gradient, rising a thousand feet in one brief mile between Porus and Williamsfield; but the baking carriages gained no immediate relief from the higher air, and the passengers turned restlessly in the double seats, and dozed fitfully behind gauze veils and blue glasses. In Ellice Hillier's compartment there were four or five Americans and a well-dressed Native whose coloured face looked odd to her above the white linen collar. She was beginning to feel the littleness of England merely through finding her countrymen and women so much in the minority, and to look upon Jamaica as to all intents an American colony—as indeed she is in the towns. It is in the wild country districts that the old spirit of Colonization survives, and the tenacity of the British still claims the soil as its own.

At Williamsfield the native women and children thronged below the carriage windows on the very line, bearing trays of fruit—golden bananas and branches of Tangerine oranges and even pines. Ellice had brought no lunch with her, for in her feverish anxiety to leave Kingston nothing had seemed of importance except that the train should start, and she had fretted and cowered in her seat until the slowly moving engine dragged

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the carriage out of the station. Now, past noon, she was not hungry, but her mouth was dry and parched and she looked wistfully at the fruit, half afraid to move, to speak, to do anything but endure until she felt herself safe from pursuit. For the nightmare of the slow miles was a haunting fear that she might be followed, stopped, taken back into captivity—the unreasoning fancies of a sick brain. At Spanish Town indeed a man had entered her compartment who bore a resemblance to her husband, and for one sickening moment her heart had stood still, paralysed with fear. It was not he, but the chance likeness showed her what might have been. After that she had kept her face steadily towards the window, bitterly regretting that she had no veil like the American women, and watched the gradual rise and fall of the miles that would not flee quickly enough. Every one of them passed bore her further off from her terror and seemed a visible barrier. Now they were at May Pen—now at Four Paths; she furtively read the list of stations on a card she had procured at starting, and felt an insane anger at the longer wait at Williamsfield. Some one said the down train was delayed—they could not go on until that had passed. Then one of the Americans leaned from the window and bargained with the natives for fruit—three oranges for a penny—it seemed a marvellous cheapness to English Ellice. She grew desperate with the delay in the heat and the blinding light, and bought in her turn for something to do—to distract her. The juicy fruit was welcome, and eased her nerves by refreshing her tired body.

“I guess we’d have got better fruit at Porus!” said the American, her slow sweet voice absorbed in the mere material speculation. She was a large woman with hair as golden as Ellice’s own, but the sleepy brown eyes had seen life and read it, and there was a certain curve to her lips that meant sorrow. Ellice glanced at her vaguely, wondering why she should like

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to look at a stranger, but it did not occur to her that the American had exactly what was wanting in her own face. Even the violent emotion of her discovery about her husband hardly altered its narrowness of feature and expression; any strong feeling indeed was so strange an experience that she resented it, and its mere endurance absorbed all her faculties. She hardly heard what the two women near her were saying in an unlowered sing-song, until a name seemed to leap out to her consciousness, just as her husband's had from the verandah at Myrtle Bank.

"Lynda Odell's not going home by that fruit boat after all," was what Mrs. Hillier heard. "She's just sticking to that Hotel as if she were crazy!"

"Well, I know why!" returned the other. "And I think it's foolish. She's a really attractive woman, and every one talks of her and of that man as they wouldn't do if she were homely!"

"I tried to persuade her to go to Port Antonio with me, but she wanted to have him hanging round all the time, and I just got mad at that. I said, 'Lynda, you've got to leave Mr. Hillier at Kingston if you come with me! There's been too much talk.' I guess she'll be sorry she didn't agree before the Season's out!"

Ellice's hands gripped the division of her seat tightly as she turned her face from the speakers. It seemed as if the whole world were talking of her and her affairs, though her name had never come into the scandal. She began to feel the humiliation of the neglected wife, and her little conventional pride was wounded by her anomalous position. Hitherto her feeling towards Hillier had been one of passive resistance and crude contempt. Now she almost hated him actively because of the slight put upon her.

The down train flashed by at last and the up train proceeded. The long sweeps of lovely country passed by Ellice and found

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her blind, her sight turned inwards to the tumult of her own brain, giant valley and far-flung prodigal hills as nothing to her. Here and there amongst the magnificence of greenery was a group of Native huts, thatched and weather-boarded—hardly more than shelters for savage life. And the brown children sprawled upon the grass of the clearing, or slept under the great banana fans, while the men and women lounged in the open doorway and seemed to do nothing but peel yams. It was raw Jamaica, such elementary impulses of life as the first settlers might have seen, and the towns and their ugly, slipshod civilization seemed to fall further and further into distance.

At Catadupa a storm of rain suddenly darkened the blue and green landscape and blotted out the view with pouring mists. The water streamed over the labouring engine and drove into the carriages, forcing the passengers to close the doors. It was cooler without the sun, however, and Ellice went and stood at the further end of the compartment, watching the great blind landscape. It seemed to her that they were going slower than ever, and the fever in her longed for quicker motion. The swing of the train kept monotonous time to a fragment of song that her dead friend had sung, and which she did not know that she had remembered. It sounded pathetic in conjunction with poor Eleanor.

“Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love,
Wherever the sun shines, the waters flow.
It hurts the snowdrop, it hurts the dove,
God on His throne, and man below.” *

Though she was unaware of it, Ellice was doing her best to qualify for a slight attack of fever—the malarial fever of the

* These verses are by George Macdonald.

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country, which is by no means "yellow," but is quite as unpleasant in its small way. It comes with a swelling sensation in the head, burning heat, and ague; and when it has passed (which is usually the case in twenty-four hours) the patient loses yet more strength in the baths of perspiration by which Nature rights herself. Those accustomed to the climate take quinine and avoid damp, by which precautions they so secure themselves that they begin to deny that fever exists at all. But Ellice had gone without food all day, feeling the unaccustomed heat and her own excitement too greatly to eat, save for two Tangerine oranges. Now, as she felt the extreme moisture of the atmosphere, she shivered, and was conscious that her head ached, but as the storm swung over to the south-east and the long rays of sun shot through the velvet-grey clouds again on to the quivering wet green, she thought no more of the momentary chill and returned restlessly to her seat to await the end of the journey.

The train was late, owing to the delay at Williamsfield. It was five o'clock instead of half past four as Ellice stepped on to the little station at Montpelier and saw her trunks being disgorged by the train further down the platform. They looked so large a pile (for Eleanor's boxes as well as her own had been labelled at Myrtle Bank with her name) that she was a little uncomfortable about them. In such a small, rural district as this, how was she to get all that luggage conveyed to Mafoota! She remembered Mr. Pryce's warning of "an hour's drive at least," and her heart sank.

"Going to the Hotel, please?" said the porter.

"No—I—there should be a carriage to meet me!" faltered Mrs. Hillier, looking forlornly round the strange little place. Outside the station a road ran to nowhere in her imagination, and two or three of the most ramshackle buggies she had ever seen drooped under the eaves of the station roof. It was

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impossible that the ragged ponies in their broken harness could drag her great boxes over a raw country which she saw all round her! The train gliding on out of the station to Montego Bay seemed the last link with civilization severed. She turned to the porter desperately.

"Is there any one here from Mr. Pryce—Mr. Richard Pryce of Mafoota?" she demanded.

Two men, one a porter and one a station master, she thought, were standing looking at her with the idle curiosity of all Native life. They were both coloured, and she began to feel an impatient dislike of their vacant staring eyes. They turned to each other blankly.

"Dunno 'im. Any one from Mafoota?" called the older man—he who might be the station master.

Two more men drew near—loafers of the station, and Negroes also. They slouched up with their hands in the ragged pockets of their trousers, and grinned childishly.

"Dar's dat young man out dar, wid de mules. He's Pryce's busha, I t'ink!" said one, but his unaccustomed accent lost the words to Ellice. It sounded to her as if he spoke in a foreign tongue.

"Wal, go an' see," ordered the porter, and the Negro shambled off, while the three men left went on staring at Ellice with broad unconcern. Their manner seemed to her insolent, and she coloured angrily, experiencing for the first time that brutal impulse of the White that makes him long to cuff the Black because his instinct warns him that one must needs be open master over the other.

The loafer did not return, but instead there came swinging into the station a young man in riding breeches and long clumsy boots, a flannel shirt and a loose grey jacket over it. He had no collar, and his bare throat was burnt as brown as his lean young face. Nevertheless, he was a white man to Ellice's

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uncritical eyes at least, and she made an instinctive movement towards him.

"I am Mr. Pryce's bookkeeper—are you for Mafoota?" he said at once with simple directness, and a brief touch to his big felt hat that was an apology for lifting it. He looked at Ellice with interest for a moment as she stood in the revealing sunshine, her hair a wonderful deep gold and her face pinched and worn from late experiences. Making all allowances for tire, however, the young man turned his face from her with the same indifference and disappointment that the waiter at Myrtle Bank had felt. He seldom saw a new white face, all the women within twenty or thirty miles of him being old acquaintances of three or four years' standing at least, though he saw even them but seldom. Ellice's golden hair was apt to raise hopes in masculine minds that her face always dispelled.

"Yes—I want to go to Mr. Pryce's house at Mafoota," said Mrs. Hillier nervously. It was not necessary to explain here and now who she was; nevertheless she felt that she was an interloper and under false pretences.

"I brought the big buggy and the mules," remarked the bookkeeper. "I was waiting outside. Any luggage?"

"A good deal, I am afraid," said Ellice with the shadow of a smile. "But it need not all come with me. Could it be sent on afterwards?"

She pointed to the pile of boxes—her own and Eleanor's—blocking up the Montpelier station, and the young man's lips formed themselves in a silent whistle.

"All that! I'm afraid we can only take a trunk or two in the buggy. But we will send over a waggon"—he brushed aside the Negroes who were beginning to giggle and pass remarks to each other on Ellice's property, and brought them suddenly to order.

"Now then! Stir yourselves and bring one of these trunks

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out to the buggy. What d'you mean by standing there grinning, and not lending a helping hand?" The loud rough tone changed again to off-hand courtesy as he turned to Ellice. "Will you tell the boy which you want, Miss Honouram," he said.

The "boy" — a loose-limbed, six-foot fellow of thirty-five perhaps—followed Ellice to the formidable pile and swung the cabin trunk she picked out onto his shoulders. She would take nothing else except her dressing bag, but it was a fairly large trunk (her own, and not Eleanor's) and she had contrived to get some washing done in Kingston even in the twenty-four hours during which she was there, so that she felt secure of clothes, even if the rest of the luggage were delayed. The trunk was strapped on behind the buggy, a four-wheeled, two-seated conveyance drawn by two mules, in the back of which Ellice seated herself with her dressing bag and the roll of rugs and umbrellas that English people always bring with them; the bookkeeper took the reins, and bidding the man holding the mules (the first who had shambled out of the station) stand out of the way, he cracked his long stock whip and they jolted out into the road.

For the first four or five miles Ellice sat in silence, looking at the unfamiliar country and experiencing the sick misery that besets travellers in the desert now and then. She felt utterly lonely, and was faint-hearted from lack of food, and the wild green luxuriance opening and closing round her was more desolate than the ugliest spot at home. The road began to ascend very soon, and as the light fell lower the strange trees and lawless vines bordering the winding way appeared oppressively green and insistently luxuriant. It was all so prodigal of beauty and teeming with rich life! But the trees and the green things of Earth had it all to themselves—not a bird's note broke the rich stillness, not a single wild thing ran

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across the path. Only the clatter of the mules' uneven gait beat time to the poor little song still worrying Ellice's exhausted brain:

"Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love,
Wherever the sun shines, the waters flow!"

Pedestrians upon the road were almost equally scarce, though about a mile from Montpelier an old woman started up from the roadside with a suddenness that made Ellice start, and held out a basket in skinny brown hands. The buggy pulled up, and the bookkeeper bargained in offhand fashion for the fruit lifted to his inspection, offering some to Ellice as soon as they set off again. But the mangoes were strange to her, and she refused them with British suspicion of the unknown. Further still they stopped again to buy Avocado pears of two boys, this marketing on the road seeming hardly less uncivilized to Ellice than the fruits that it procured them. Except for the offer of the mangoes the young man driving had not spoken to the girl behind him, but when the sun was nearly setting he turned to her and advised her to unstrap her wraps and put some of them on. It would grow colder after the light was gone, and would feel damp. They had had heavy rain that afternoon.

"I know. It was like a waterspout on the way up!" said Ellice, her shyness not apparent in her composed manner. She invariably gained the credit of being rather repellent when most nervous.

The young man laughed, however, with a touch of superiority in his manner. "You are not used to tropical rain. Wait till you see the wet season! I forgot to tell you my name, Miss Honouram. I am Jersey King."

"Thank you. I think Mr. Pryce did mention it," said Ellice with unintentional stiffness. "Are we far from Mafoota?"

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"We shall be at the end of our journey in another twenty minutes. This is the Penn now."

Ellice looked round her blankly, wondering why he called the wild open country a Penn. The rank vegetation had changed to rough fencing on either side of the road, it is true, and beyond were the richest pastures she had ever seen—long, thick grass that looked not only green but actually juicy: but there were no narrow, hurdled spaces packed with sheep, which to her mind represented the word he had used. The pastures were vast, broken fields, with here and there a huge tree, so white-barked that it stood out weirdly in the dusk. Ellice was to know them well later on as cotton-trees—the haunted trees of Jamaica, which the Negroes will not pass at night because the Duppies sit in rows on the lower branches. She thought them sufficiently uncanny in appearance without any addition of ghosts, for the naked trunk and twisted branches gave them the air of giants with outstretched arms.

Suddenly the path curved sharply round a bend of the hill they had been descending into valley land, and they drove across a shallow stream that promised to be more formidable in the wet weather. There was a bridge higher up, as Jersey King explained, but this was a short-cut, and saved half a mile. The mules scrambled out on the sloping bank and threatened to overturn the buggy altogether as they blundered on to firm ground again, while Ellice set her white lips and choked back a cry.

"Frightened?" said Jersey King over his shoulder, as if he knew her feeling by instinct. "It's all right—they are very sure-footed. There's the house."

It stood at the top of a slope (was there ever a house built up country in Jamaica that was not on a hill?) and was backed, but not sheltered, by a plantation of cocoa nuts—only one tree, indeed, broke the waste of grass nearer at hand, and that

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was but a darker blurr upon the night just now. Ellice never forgot her first view of Mafoota, coming in from the dusk of the Penn—a large, low house, two-storied, however, with a gabled roof and a verandah as deep as an extra room upon the east side, but narrowing somewhat upon the north, which was the front of the house. There was a glow of light from the dark open doorway, and in it she saw the figure of a large man in much the same dress as Jersey King. The vision of the clean bucolic English farmer which she had been cherishing vanished forever from Ellice's mind as she looked up in the light of the swinging lamp over Mr. Pryce's head, and saw him. He was as lean as his bookkeeper, but so big-boned that he gained no emaciation—an old, grey-haired man, with a queer kindly face and eyes that smiled a welcome. For the first time since she set sail from England Ellice felt she had touched safety. Without waiting to give the explanation she owed him (that could come later) she put out her hands towards the welcome she found upon the doorstep, and stood fearless of the future.

“Well, little girl! So you've got here safely. Half starved, I suppose, and very tired?”

He laid a large hand upon her shoulder and stooping down kissed her white face. Eleanor's kiss! Eleanor's welcome! Ellice struggled to speak now, and to tell him; even while her hands clung mechanically to the shelter of his arm. Oh, if she had only been his niece! If this had only been her own! It had not struck her, even when Jersey King called her Miss Honouram, that there would be complications in the situation, or that explanations would be difficult.

She heard the buggy rattle off in the darkness, and for a minute she stood alone with Richard Pryce, the two looking at each other in the light of the hanging lamp. Beneath his penthouse brows the old man's eyes were inscrutable, but

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behind him she saw, vaguely, the great glooms and shadows of the house, and a dark shallow stairway leading, in her imagination, to peace and shelter. Now was her opportunity—now she must tell him.

“You look just tired out, Ellie. You’ll be more fit to talk to-morrow,” said the Penn-keeper, and with his strong arm round her slight shoulders he guided her from the door into the house. “Would you rather go straight to bed, and not come in to supper? We always have a meal of sorts between six and seven, for the boys.”

As she yielded to his guidance Ellice was still framing the inadequate sentences in her brain whereby she must tell him. But it was every instant becoming more difficult to say, “I am not your niece—she died on the voyage. I am only Ellice Hillier—a woman whose husband has deserted her for some one else after a few months of marriage! I have no claim on you.” She hesitated—and was lost. . . .

“If I might go to my room and rest for to-night, Uncle, I think I should be fresher in the morning, as you say.”

She heard her own voice framing the lie glibly, and wondered at herself. This was not what she had meant to say. In throwing herself on Mr. Pryce’s protection she had never thought to steal Eleanor’s personality, and indeed had she deliberately planned it, she would have foreseen difficulties impossible to overcome, and shrunk from an almost certain discovery. But the situation seemed inevitable when it came. She thought she heard him draw a deep breath as if of relief or satisfaction, but she closed her ears desperately to conscience or questioning and let him lead her down a narrow passage with a slippery wood floor, and open a door in front of her where, he told her, was her room. The space before her looked immense, and she stumbled into the darkness. Even when her host had lit a candle for her, and she glanced round, the wide

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bed and the wardrobe seemed isolated details in a vast stretch of bare walls and flooring.

“You get straight into bed, and I’ll send you in some food,” said Richard Pryce heartily. “Good night, little girl,—sleep well.”

He stepped towards the door, his big boots resounding on the bare boards. Then he hesitated, came back a step, and looked half humorous and half bashful.

“Give me another kiss, Ellie!” he said gently. “You don’t know how set up I am at having one of my own kin with me! I’m a lonely old fellow, . . . and we’re going to be pals, you and I!”

Then the last remnant of Ellice’s scruples went into the past with all that she had thrust behind her. There was an empty niche in this homestead, it seemed, awaiting somebody. Why not she, as well as another? She put her arms up round the old man’s burnt neck and laid her tired gold head against a hard shoulder.

“Oh, I’m so glad to get to you! So glad to be here!” she said wildly. “I have been so frightened—so frightened—”

And then, instead of the merciful faint he half expected, the startled man felt her slip to his feet, still cruelly conscious of existence, and crying bitterly.

CHAPTER III

'Twixt the sunlight and the shade
Float up memories of my maid,
God, remember Gwendolen!
Gold or gems she did not wear,
But her yellow rippled hair,
Like a veil, hid Gwendolen!

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THERE is no cure for a mental trouble so certain as the counter-irritant of a physical one. Those people who succumb to headache at the first trial of worry do not appreciate their good fortune, and think that their cup of woe is augmented by being unable to think, for the time being, of anything but the tangible pain; but as a fact they are more enviable for the distraction than stronger mortals whose bodies decline to give way, and whose brains therefore go on labouring with the immediate trouble which is only, though surely, to be cured by Time.

The excitement suddenly breaking the calm of Ellice Hillier's life, followed by fatigue and fasting, and aided by the unaccustomed climate, resulted in the slight attack of fever which Mr. Pryce shrewdly expected after her arrival. When she broke down into a fit of crying at his feet he did not wait to look for the cause, but gauged the results, his own course of action being to lift her on to the bed and advise her to get into it as soon as she was sufficiently recovered. Then he went away, leaving a great blank behind him, and Ellice, still trembling from physical and mental tire, slipped off her clothes and crept in between the cool sheets.

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The bed seemed very hard that night, for she was not used to straw mattresses, and she slept fitfully under the fall of the mosquito curtains, which in a series of nightmares were always her bridal veil. . . . When she awoke in the morning her head felt heavy and her limbs languid, and she wondered if she need get up. All the tension of the day before seemed to have passed from her, and nothing mattered save that she might have to move. By the light of the full, West Indian day, struggling through the closed jalousies, she saw her bed-chamber, and it seemed a little oasis of peace out of which she did not wish to stir until her languor and sickness were overpast. The great stretch of her floor was dark and polished, unbroken in its central space, and only marked out round the walls by pieces of furniture which looked like islands in its sea of emptiness. There was a high, narrow dressing table draped with old-fashioned muslin, whereon Ellice's silver-backed brushes, hastily unearthed the night before, contrasted oddly with a small square of glass propped up against the wall behind—by no means the toilet glass of any bedroom to which she had been accustomed. A large dark wardrobe occupied another space of wall, and a meagre washhandstand was flanked by her own trunk on one side and a large wooden tub on the other. What the room lacked in movable fittings it seemed to make up in substantial decoration; the great door was of polished mahogany, so was the window seat, a deep recess some two feet deep, and the beams running across the ceiling were of the same wood, contrasting sharply with the plain whitewashed walls. Ellice speculated wildly as to whether the dark boards of the floor were mahogany, and the frame of her strange bed. But it did not matter much—nothing mattered save the lassitude of her body, the discomfort of feeling hot and cold by turns, and the sleepy sunlight creeping across the cool dark room which it somehow soothed her to watch.

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After a time—hours after she woke, it seemed to her—the door was tapped at and opened by the same black girl who had brought her a basin of soup and some bread last night, the only food she had eaten. The girl was barefooted and dressed in a short print gown with a gay-coloured bandana pinned about her woolly head. Beneath the bright folds of cotton her shining face smiled at Ellice with dark sleepy eyes, and she spoke in the monotonous soft voice that suits so well with a sick room.

“Massa want to know how are yo’, please!”

“Oh, would you ask if I need get up? I am very tired—I think, and I don’t feel very well,” said Ellice, feebly.

“Massa say yo’ are sure to lie still ef yo’ feel de fever!” said the girl, still smiling in the gentle fashion of a sick-nurse.

“Fever!” said Ellice vaguely, flinging away the hot gold hair from her face. “Is this—fever?”

The girl smiled still, but did not answer. After a long pause that seemed full of the sunshine creeping in behind her through the open door and her own benignity, she went away, to return later with a basin of bread and milk.

“Massa says you mus’ eat dis, and he send you medicine, please!” she said in the same deliberate fashion, and Ellice submitted because it was less trouble than to refuse the food, eating it while the girl stood contentedly by the bedside. A little later the same attendant brought her a cup with more milk in it, this time tasting bitterly of quinine, and the dose was repeated during the day, only varied by a basin of soup at midday (at which Ellice looked askance for its greasiness) and some flavourless boiled fish and bread for supper. She was not hungry while the fever stayed with her, and accepted the diet meekly, only eating because she was told. But in twenty-four hours the burning and shivering had departed, her head no longer felt swelled, and instead her body was

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bathed in perspiration, which brought back her appetite and made her feel horribly weak.

She was two or three days in her great room, without attempting to leave it, and only waited on by the black girl, who brought her more solid meals after her first day's diet, sauced with messages from Mr. Pryce. Ellice found the food hard to eat, for she had no taste for the subtleties of Jamaican cooking, particularly as an invalid; but the messages she took to her heart as treasures, and tried to do as he bade her. The hot bath he recommended after the fever had left her was no difficulty, though in that climate she felt as if it were more than Turkish, and she half suspected the cleanliness of the rough wooden tub; but the greasiness of the messed-up meat and the horrible flavourings in the dishes made her soul rebel, and she secretly challenged the cook who condemned an English-speaking household to such food.

"If 'Uncle Dick' will let me, I will make some reforms in the cooking!" she thought desperately, her returning energies finding a sudden hope of an outlet. "At least I do know the theory of preparing food!" She had adopted the Penn-keeper in the shy silence of her heart as Uncle Dick—but no one ever spoke of Mr. Pryce as "Richard" once they had made his acquaintance, though Ellice did not yet recognise that universal fact. She only felt that the diminutive was more human and kindly, and her utter loneliness clung to the memory of that first welcome, and shed a halo round the big spare figure that was all she remembered of her arrival at Mafoota. She did indeed recall that one of his messages had included a reference to his "housekeeper," and that he had spoken of the "boys" amongst whom she rather indifferently classed the bookkeeper, Jersey King; but the rest of the household sank into insignificance beyond the individuality of the Penn-keeper himself. All she hoped was that the housekeeper might be a coloured

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woman who would not interfere with her reforms, for already she had struck one small delicate root down into the kindly soil of Mafoota, and regarded her surroundings as permanent. Curiously enough, the fear of pursuit and discovery and being reclaimed by her husband, or even her own people, had left her with the fever; as she sat in the American rocking chair which the black girl dragged into the room as soon as she could leave her bed, she felt very helpless and weak indeed, but as if a new life flowed in her veins—as if her whole existence were to be rejuvenated.

It was a desire to see the one face that she regarded as a friend's that finally drew her out of her room. She had been content to sit there, hardly thinking, not attempting to read or sew, for two days before she made the effort; but with returning vitality came the natural desire for human interests, and the Penn-keeper was the only one at hand. The black girl always threw wide the jealousies as soon as the sun was off the room, and opened the doors wide onto the verandah. Ellice sat just inside in her rocking chair and looked at the view, but her thoughts hardly fastened consciously upon it, and she merely used it to rest her eyes from the monotony of her nearer surroundings. Below the wooden railing of the verandah was a falling slope of green grass, shut in by a hedge of *Acali-pha*, and beyond in the valley land were rich green meadows like those through which they had driven on her arrival, and the little stream, and innumerable, illimitable boughs of tossing trees and wild creepers where the land had not been "cleaned" for pasture. The woody hollows stretched all along the valley, and beyond rose the range of hills, blue and purple and brown, and swept into patches of green and yellow all day by the eternal cloud shadows and sun gleams of the changing sky. That it was beautiful was a mere matter of fact to Ellice at present; but how beautiful she was yet to learn by association

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and custom with the large, teeming country. The view meant nothing to her as yet, except rescue. She loved Mafoota already for its silent refuge offered to her terror, but her eyes were still turned inwards on her own bruised past.

She was sitting in her usual seat on the third day after her arrival, about four in the afternoon, when there came a knock at the door. As it was tea time she expected the black girl with the washy beverage usually offered her for tea, and said, "Come in," without turning her head. But a shod foot sounded on the polished floor instead of the bare soles of the Negress, and she started and turned her face, almost uttering an exclamation in her surprise at the vision approaching her. It was a young woman, who might have looked about her own age save for the air of ripeness and maturity about her. She was as round and soft as a child, but her figure was that of a young mother, and as she came forward she gave Ellice the impression of being as barefooted and uncorseted as the black servant, for all that her heels clicked on the floor and her waist was so well defined. But it was her face that took Mrs. Hillier's breath away, for it was the most perfect type of brunette beauty that she thought she had ever seen—pure brunette, she said to herself innocently, admiring the smooth dark hair which had a reddish tinge in its looser masses, and the wonderful glooms of her brown eyes. The young woman's skin was a warm olive, and her full lips soft and pink. She strolled up to the window where Ellice sat, and looked at her with an air of unfriendly curiosity.

"Are you better to-day?" she said in a full assured voice, with no more formal introduction. "I promised Mr. Pryce I'd come and see, and not leave you to the servants any more. I'm Miss Scott—Lily Scott." She caught herself up a little fiercely, her thick brows frowning over her big eyes. "I'm the housekeeper here."

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"Oh!" said Ellice with a little shock of disappointment. She remembered her hope that the housekeeper should be a coloured woman, and felt blankly that this self-assertive young person would never allow her to interfere with the cooking or anything else. "Thank you very much—yes, I am better," she said confusedly, for Miss Scott's appearance had taken her utterly by surprise. "But I feel very weak and stupid."

The housekeeper did not answer for a minute; she was looking with an envy that Ellice did not recognise at the burnished flow of gold hair falling over the invalid's shoulders. It had been too much trouble to Ellice to put up her hair since she had been ill, as long as she kept to her own room; and she had merely slipped into a white wrapper and left her hair to fall about her like a second mantle. The wrapper was a dainty thing—one of the expensive items of the heiress's trousseau—and Lily Scott's eyes took in each detail of its lace and chiffon with a covetous thought of how well it would suit her own luxurious loveliness. It was just the sort of garment she would have chosen to lounge away her day in, could she have been as idle and extravagant as she pleased, and it was hardly a consolation to her envy to see that the English girl did not become it as well as she would herself, though she knew that Ellice looked fragile and colourless beside her own glow and exuberance.

"You have had a turn of fever, and it's pulled you down," she said indifferently. "You do look played out! I expect you'll pick up later—if you like heat?"

"I never was in a hot climate before—I don't know."

"It's always hot here. There's not much change Summer or Winter," said Miss Scott, and then there was a pause while they looked at each other as if equally nonplussed for conversation.

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"Well, I must be seeing after things," said the housekeeper, rousing herself from her lounging attitude against the open window frame. She had leaned there so naturally that she seemed graceful to Ellice, who followed her indolent movements with a kind of fascination. "Mr. Pryce said if you felt well enough to come in to supper he'd be glad to see you!" she added over her shoulder as she sauntered out of the room.

But for that final clause Ellice would have put off the ordeal of facing more strangers at present, and would have remained in her own room. But the hunger in her for the big personality of the old Penn-keeper overruled even the slackness that the fever had left. She wanted to feel sure of him again, and of his protection, even if he should discover that she was not his niece, and the sight and sound of him were the best proofs of that. She hardly cared to wonder now that she had had no answering letter from her husband, or any enquiries concerning her during these three days, for it did not seem to matter. She felt so safe at Mafoota with her imagination picturing the endless green miles that lay between her and Kingston. And by and bye she would make herself so necessary to Dick Pryce in his loneliness that he would not want her to go—she promised herself to win him even while she languidly wound up her golden hair and changed her wrapper for a very simple white gown.

It was six o'clock and growing dusk, when she opened the door of her room a little uncertainly and stepped out into the passage that she remembered. The swinging lamp had been lit above the ever open door, and by its light she inspected her surroundings when she emerged from the passage. The hall had hardly struck her on her first entrance to the house, but now she saw that it was evidently the principal sitting room, for a long table stood spread in its centre, and it was no doubt here that the evening meal was taken. It was an unconven-

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tional dining room, for besides the passage leading to her room the broad shallow staircase rose out of it on one side, the open door made another exit opposite, and on the right were evidently the kitchens and sculleries from the noise proceeding from them. Outside, beyond the doorway, the broad verandah lay in increasing darkness.

There was a curiously insecure feeling about this house with its innumerable entrances, to Ellice, now that she saw it more in detail, and she wondered if it were possible to lock it up at all at night. The staircase probably led to more bedrooms. She noticed that it turned sharply to the left and must arrive at a room immediately above her own, and remembered having heard the sound of passing feet, no doubt on its uncarpeted steps. To the right of the stairs there was another doorway—open, of course—and, as she afterwards discovered, the house stretched far out in this direction, covering as much ground as if it had been a bungalow. For when an extra room had been wanted it had been built out, and only the square original structure was two-storied. In this new portion, beyond the staircase, were Mr. Pryce's own rooms—bedroom and dressing room opening on to the east verandah, besides the office where the books were kept, and two or three bachelor rooms for the younger men. For there were no bookkeepers' barracks at Mafoota as there are on almost all Jamaican estates. The house was so large that, being a bachelor, Mr. Pryce had thought he might utilise the unused rooms for his staff instead of locating them at a distance—an experiment he eventually had cause to regret. There was no other general sitting room save the central hall, what might have been a woman's sanctum upstairs having been annexed by Lily Scott for her own untidy possessions. The men smoked in the office or on the verandahs, and the social life at Mafoota was confined to the gathering at meals.

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Ellice sat down in an old basket chair near the doorway when her immediate inspection was over, feeling a little giddy and faint already. From the kitchens to her right came the faint sing-song drawl of Negro voices, and every now and then a burst of laughter that struck her as startlingly loud and senseless. She could distinguish no words, but through the slur of native voices it seemed to her that there ran a clearer note, like that of the voice she had heard this afternoon, and she wondered if a housekeeper's duties forced Lily Scott to tolerate the noisy merriment amongst the servants even in her presence. She pitied her sincerely if it were so, and marvelled that she should not check the noise. Outside the night had wiped out the view, and even the slope of the hill-side, which was but a few yards off, was indistinguishable; but while she sat there she heard the feet of a horse cantering up the ascent, and the next instant the rider was shouting for some one to take it to the stables. She had recognised the rougher tones of Jersey King's voice before the young man came into the verandah and lifted his hat offhandedly at the sight of her white figure.

"Good evening, Miss Honouram! Glad to see you about again. Feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you," said Ellice, with a shade more reserve in her manner. She did not admire the lack of polish in this young man, and her eyes hardly lingered on him after the first polite glance of greeting. He looked hot and tired, the beads of perspiration standing on his burnt forehead and under the rings of fair hair that he pushed away from it with a coarse handkerchief. The dust on his clothes and the lines round his eyes suggested that he had been in the saddle for long hours, and she noticed this while she never asked herself if he were good-looking or the reverse—it seemed of so little importance.

"There's the Mail—I rode out to Montpelier to fetch it,"

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he said in the same short fashion. "There's nothing for you. I thought there might be. No one has been for letters since you came."

"Do you mean that the post does not come in every day?" she asked, startled, though her heart had given a throb of relief at hearing there was nothing for her.

"It comes up from Kingston by the train—the same that you came by," he answered. "But we don't always send over for it, because there may be no one to send!"

"Then your letters may lie at the station for days!"

He nodded. "If there are any—we don't have many here. I'll go and clean up a bit before supper. Is Mr. Pryce in?"

"I have not seen him!"

"He went over to Hill Pasture this afternoon. I don't suppose he has had time to get in yet."

He walked off, his riding boots creaking down the surmised passage beyond the door by the stairs. Long after he was out of sight Ellice could hear him echoing into distance for lack of any furniture or draperies in the house to deaden sound. All things done in Mafoota house were practically cried upon the housetop for this reason. Even her own step, as she walked up to the table where Jersey King had thrown the letters, was startlingly guilty to Ellice, but she felt she must see if her husband had written to Mr. Pryce. There were three letters, two for the Penn-keeper, and one (a big package, evidently patterns from a Kingston storekeeper) for Lily Scott. But Mr. Pryce's letters were obviously not from Hillier, or indeed any one in Kingston, one being postmarked from Montego Bay, the other in very uneducated handwriting from a neighbouring place. Ellice put them down hastily, and went back to her seat under the lamp.

After a while there were more horses' hoofs, and the shouting for the grooms to come and take the horses, but the riders

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evidently dismounted at some side door and did not enter the house from the front. She did not hear the arrival for which she was waiting, either, and the first intimation she had of "Uncle Dick's" proximity was his large, loose figure emerging from the dusk of the verandah. She rose to meet him without her usual reserve, and held out her hand with a smile.

"So here you are!" he said, and there was the same quizzical, kindly look in his deeply set eyes that she had been treasuring. "Now this is real home, to find my own girl waiting for me! Feeling better, honey?"

With a shy demonstration Ellice rubbed her white face against the loose sleeve of the old man's flannel jacket, wondering a little at herself. She had never offered boisterous affection to any one, her childish caresses having been as carefully trained as the rest of her impulses. But in the lawlessness of Mafoota she felt the trammels slipping from her already.

"Yes—I'm much better, Uncle Dick!"

"Rather shaken still, eh? Thought you were going in for fever first sight of your little pinched face! Seen my house-keeper yet?"

"Yes—she came to see me this afternoon, and told me you would like me to come to supper."

"So you came, eh? That's my girl! I must go and wash my hands for table. Are the boys come in?"

"Mr. King is—I think the others went round to the back of the house."

Mr. Pryce vanished through the same doorway as Jersey King, and Ellice sat down once more to wait, with a renewed content. They were going to be friends, this rough unpolished man and herself, and she had never had a friend of her own choosing. Her life had been so carefully ruled for her that only the instinct of a child could have saved her from an unwise

selection; but she never hesitated in her certainty of Dick Pryce.

Supper was supposed to be at six o'clock, but as a fact it was any time between that hour and seven. Jersey King was the first to reappear, and he was followed by two other book-keepers—people of less importance evidently, from the tone which existed between all three. The subordinates, as Ellice gradually discovered, were only learning their work, while Jersey had been at the Penn since he was a lad, and was of use to Mr. Pryce, though not so invaluable as he thought himself. He made his companions known to Ellice by name as Mr. George Saunders and Mr. Arnold Whitworth. The latter was a mere youth, with a bright dark face and shy manners; but when she looked at Saunders Ellice had the shock of finding herself bowing to a man so dark coloured that he might fairly be called a Negro. She had not as yet acquired the racial objection to sitting down to table with black blood, but she was vaguely glad when she found her seat between Mr. Pryce and Jersey King, the coloured man being on the opposite side of the table, but furthest off from her. The last person to make her appearance was Lily Scott—Lily Scott in a blouse of cheap silk and lace, with no collar, but a string of painfully false pearls round her beautiful throat, and a badly made skirt of some blue material. In her coarse dark hair she had fastened a blossom of the hibiscus, and dressed the hair itself in such an exaggerated style to show its quantity that her head looked three times the size of Ellice's. How fond she seemed of colour! Mrs. Hillier looked at the glowing face and the red and blue and white of her clothes, and felt as if she wanted to blink. The cheap blouse and the false pearls were a shock to her, and she shrank still more from the tone of the young men in speaking to the housekeeper, who sat down at the head of the table, opposite the Penn-keeper, with an assertion that evidently amused the company.

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"Hulloa, Lily! Got 'em all on?" said Saunders familiarly. "—! But you are piling it high to-night!"

"Going to boss the show, Lily?" said the slight dark youth sitting opposite to Ellice. He laughed as he spoke, and showed a row of most beautiful teeth, but happening to glance across the table at Ellice he met her unsympathetic eyes and their coldness seemed to freeze him back into a new diffidence. Throughout the rest of the meal he offered his chaff to Lily Scott in an undertone.

Talk was desultory, the men eating with the hearty appetite of youth and many hours in the saddle. They had been riding about most of the day, looking after stock, and the rankly flavoured dishes with their inevitable grease did not seem to come amiss to them. The black servants brought in the food and set it down upon the table, but did not wait; and the men mostly helped themselves as they felt inclined. Ellice felt a little as if she had got to the raw edge of the world. The unconventional life was so utterly strange an experience.

"They have had more rain at Montpelier than we have up here," remarked Jersey King to the table in general. "I met Nugent at the station, and he told me that Bragging Tom is down at Knockalva."

"They would be glad of that visitor!" said Dick Pryce, with a certain dryness that puzzled Ellice. "But Nugent is a liar—it is two months before they can expect Tom. Did you go up to the Hotel, King?"

"No, sir. I had only time to call for the letters and ride back. I shall have to change that saddle, by the way—Queenie has got a sore back."

"How's that? Has Lily been up this week?"

"No, and it wouldn't be my fault if I had!" said Miss Scott with loud decision. "I ride with a cradle, and don't slip up the hills!"

"There's not much riding about it!" said King with a careless laugh. "Lily sits still and the mare walks. But it has nothing to do with her this time."

"You'd better see to it, then—don't make Queenie any worse," said the Penn-keeper with a quiet finality in his tone that gave Ellice a new insight into his character. He turned to her with a different manner and a softened voice. "Do you ride, Ellie?"

For a minute she held her breath. Eleanor could not ride, but she herself had been taught from a child. She wondered if Mr. Pryce would remember this deficiency in his niece, for she had reasons for wishing to acknowledge herself a horse-woman.

"Yes, Uncle—I have ridden," she said slowly. "But I am not used to a rough country. Could I come with you and see how I get on?"

"It's not so bad, honey. We'll put you up, and you shall ride all over the Penn with me. Queenie will carry you when her back is better."

A black frown gathered on the housekeeper's face, and she muttered something under her breath. The mobile changes of her beauty somehow reminded Ellice of the sweep of sun and shadow over the hillside in the view beyond her verandah—the storm was as plainly to be seen darkening the one as the other. She wondered why Lily should object to her riding Mr. Pryce's mare, but when they left the table and she followed her uncle onto the verandah she heard a jeering laugh and a scrap of conversation that enlightened her.

"Hulloa, Lily! *Your* nose is out of joint!"

"Queenie won't be at *your* disposal any more!"

"I don't care!" The woman's passionate voice was more raised than the men's. "I don't want to go trailing round, messing myself up and getting hot! Let her have the mare,

and good riddance to them both! I hope she'll have a spill!"

"Nonsense, Lily!"—Jersey King's voice held such authority that it gave Ellice more of a shock than the others. Why should he speak to any woman—to this woman in particular—in the tone of a master? "You can't ride a bit, and you know it. You never took the trouble to learn, and you never go out—you haven't had Queenie for months. It's only jealousy, because you think your position is threatened with a rival. If this girl *can* ride she may just as well amuse herself like that—she's dull enough, anyway!"

The impatience in the voice told of a disappointed sensation. But Ellice did not stay to analyze. With a painful access of colour she hurried after Mr. Pryce, who was lighting his pipe at a safe distance out of earshot.

"Uncle Dick, I'm very tired—I think I'll go to my room," she said dispiritedly. "I hope—I hope I shall be brighter in a few days!"

"Bed's the best place for you at present, little girl," said the Penn-keeper, kindly, running his huge hand over her smooth glistening hair. "Yes, you'll be right enough by and bye. Good night, honey!"

Ellice went to her own room rather heavily, with Jersey King's words still in her ears. "She's dull enough, anyway!" She did not realize how few were the young man's opportunities of feminine society, or how naturally he craved for novelty, but she did see the want in herself. She was "dull"—there was no denying it, but the word stung her through her self-absorption a little, and did her service. As to Jersey King and his mates she did not care—she had no desire for the approval of young men, her connection with the term being always the nightmare of her husband. But she made a fresh vow to herself that she would not be "dull" or uninteresting to old Dick

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Pryce, and that she would at least make him good return for whatever kindness he lavished on her.

Her thoughts made her restless, or else the hour was still so early that she could not sleep. Every one went to bed early at Mafoota, for work began at five in the morning, and by nine at night all sounds in the house had ceased. But just as she was really dropping into a doze Ellice was roused anew by a step that sounded so near to her as to cause her to start up, shivering. A minute's thought, however, located it as probably coming from the staircase which wound up over her head, and she lay down again, satisfied at least that there was no stealthy foot approaching herself. Yet the sound was somewhat uncanny, coming in the vast loneliness and silence of Mafoota, and suggested secrecy,—a creaking board, then a silence, then a distinct step. It seemed to go on over her head, and be lost in the rooms above.

She lay for some minutes, listening. But no further noise served to enlighten her, and she could only suppose that some one sleeping upstairs—possibly one of the women servants, or Lily Scott—had come down again to fetch something after the household had retired, and trod softly for fear of disturbing it. And so, comforting herself, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

“And I gallop’d, and I gallop’d on my palfrey white as milk,
My robe was of the sea-green woof, my serk was of the silk;
My hair was golden yellow, and it floated to my shoe,
My eyes were like two harebells bathed in little drops of dew;
My palfrey, never stopping, made a music sweetly blent
With the leaves of Autumn dropping all around me as I went.”

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

As Ellice stepped out on to the verandah from her bedroom the view was still veiled in white mist, which hid everything save the strip of rough grass immediately below the railings, and even lay in wreaths on the acalipha hedge. But the sun was up, though only half an hour before Ellice, and was already beginning to draw up his mist curtain from the glorious panorama spread before Mafoota house. He had done this every morning for the three months that Ellice had been at Mafoota, and it was always like rolling up a curtain to her mind; but often as she watched it—for she was generally in the saddle by six o’clock of late—it had never meant anything to her up till now beyond a phenomenon with a touch of monotony about it. The sun, however, was patient—he pulled up the curtain from his beauty picture every day, and waited for comprehension to dawn in the eyes of his audience.

Ellice was in her riding habit—or rather in the thin cloth skirt, with a loose coat over a white shirt instead of the impossibly tight bodice. She had done her golden hair in two long plaits, and pressed down on her head she wore a “jippy-jappa” hat of native work, almost as fine as a Panama. When she had first started these morning rides with Uncle Dick she

had attempted to dress more conventionally, but she had gradually learned the wisdom of bowing to circumstances, and one after another of her conventions had been lost either on the far hills across the valley, or down in the scrub and tangle of uncleaned pastures. As Queenie's hard gallop was apt to shake her hair down, however tightly she twisted it round her head, she had learned to start as she inevitably came home, with tidier results; as it was impossible to see ticks on the black riding boots she had brought from England, she had discarded them in favour of an old pair which had originally belonged to Jersey King as a boy, and which he had outgrown without them wearing out. She wore no corsets under the cool linen shirt, and her body had grown supple and strong with the untrammelled exercise.

There were other changes in Mrs. Hillier also, though she was not aware of them. Her face was warm with sunburn in place of the pallor she had had on her arrival, and her narrow shoulders looked wider—or else it was that she held herself better. Into her blue-grey eyes had come a new alertness and expectancy; but they were still as innocent as a child's. She thought so little of her looks, however, that beyond seeing that she was neat and workmanlike for her morning ride she learned nothing from the reflexion in the looking glass.

The mist was rising now,—breaking into flakes and vanishing into the valley, where it still clung to the sunless hollows in white wreaths. Before Ellice's eyes broke the marvellous view that she had looked upon blindly—the breathing, bounteous Earth, green and glowing and teeming with life. She stood with her hands clasping the rail of the verandah, feeling as if she saw all things new in the light of this new day. The hills were purple and green velvet just brushed with masses of cloud hanging out of a dewy sky; at their feet the valley swept from end to end of the horizon as though the Earth

opened her arms, and all the harmony of its colouring was rich pasture and grouped wood, fruit growth and wild fodder—the fertile World that steamed with life! It throbbed up to Ellice's nostrils in the spring of the morning, until she seemed to see the sap rising.

“I have never seen it before!” she said half breathlessly, surprised to find her eyes full of tears. “I have looked at it—but I never saw it! It is mine now—from this very minute; and it looks as if God leaned from Heaven and blessed it every day!”

“Ellie!” called a man's voice at its full strength—there was no need to use lowered tones at Mafoota—“the horses are here!”

She brushed her hand childishly across her eyes, caught up her riding switch, and ran through her room and down the passage to the hall. Her own portion of the verandah was screened off from the remainder, so that she must needs go round; but she valued her privacy, and would not have had it otherwise. Mr. Pryce was standing at the steps, below which one of the black boys held the horses, and he turned at the sound of her step.

“Had anything to eat, Ellie?”

“Yes, Uncle—half an hour ago. Bessie brought me some milk as soon as the cows came up.”

“That's right. I don't want you to come out fasting, for you may not get your breakfast until late. I'm going over to Endeavour. Come along—I'll put you up.”

A Jamaican pony is sometimes a horse, in that he stands a ragged fifteen hands; but his appearance gives no particular promise of his pluck and endurance. Queenie was a limp-looking animal as she stood at the verandah steps, her meek brown nose drooping towards the enticing grass which she was too well-mannered to nibble. But experience had endeared her to Ellice, who kissed the rough white blaze between the

mare's gentle eyes, and jumped for the saddle with real satisfaction to find herself on Queenie's back. Mr. Pryce settled her in comfort, and pulled down her habit, as deftly as the best ladies' man, before he swung himself up on his own beast—a large, raw-boned black from St. Elizabeth.

The grass was white with dew about the horses' fetlocks as they rode down the slope towards the narrow stream, and so for the valley. There was a sense of waking vitality in the wide green lands of Mafoota abroad which the bookkeepers had ridden already, and only the old house seemed still nodding in the sunshine; for a bookkeeper is not so much a keeper of books (though he labours with the columns of stock and wages also) as a keeper of cattle, and he rides far and wide during the day to oversee the head-men of the Penn and their apportioned charges—so many head of oxen, so many head of mules to each man. As Ellice and her pseudo uncle breasted the bank on the other side of the stream, which they had forded, they caught a far sight of one of the younger men driving a clump of brood mares and their young up towards the distant stables. At that distance the mounted figures were as tiny marionettes, and the dark group of mares a moving mass of brown, for they were out in a further pasture known as Square Piece; but as they rode slowly on in the wake of their charges, not to hurry them, Pryce shaded his eyes with his hand and grunted out a recognition.

"Humph! That's Saunders and the boy—some of the mares in Savoy have dropped their cubs in the night."

Ellice did not answer for a moment. Her blood seemed to be bubbling up with the rising steam of the new day, and she was absorbed in her own emotions. She was feeling what she had never felt before in her staid youth—how good it is to be young! She turned to the Penn-keeper with vague, questioning eyes.

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"*Cubs*, Uncle Dick!"

"Mule cubs, honey. Have you been all this time at Mafoota and not learned so much of Penn-keeping?"

"I seem to have been going about with my eyes and ears closed!" acknowledged Ellice with a long breath. She looked at the distant toys on the rising ground of Square Piece, which were grown men on horseback driving stock, and blinked at the bright day. "How can you tell which bookkeeper it is so far off?"

"Habit, little girl—I know by the way he drives them, too. He's better at that than King—too lazy himself to hurry them. King gets them bunched in passing through a gate."

But George Saunders and Jersey King were elements in Ellice's life that had not claimed her inner attention, and the racial indolence of the brown man as compared with his whiter fellow was indifferent to her. They were both less important than the view. She turned on a side issue.

"Uncle, who is Bragging Tom?"

For a minute he stared at her. Then the twinkle came into his deep eyes, and he shook loosely in his saddle.

"What do you know of Bragging Tom, honey?"

"Why, I've heard you mention him half a dozen times as a welcome guest at some Penn beyond Montpelier, and I always meant to ask you if he were a Nigger?"

Mr. Pryce gave a deep mellow laugh that stirred the leaves of the rose-apples under which they were brushing their way. "Bragging Tom is a river, honey—a river that runs dry half the year, and leaves the land dependent on tanks. No wonder they welcome Tom at Knockalva Penn! Montpelier has the Great River and the Blue Hole to draw upon, but Knockalva stores water in ponds and waits for Bragging Tom to run. He comes with the first rains as a rule—I never knew him so early even as April. King's report must have been a lie."

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"Oh-o!" said Ellice slowly, and then began to laugh in her turn. "Never mind, Uncle Dick—I shall get as clever at names as you are by and bye. I'm waking up—waking up!" she said with sudden triumph, looking round her at the luscious valley lands through which they were pushing their way. "I know some of the pastures already—listen! Isn't that Little Campbell on our left, and the triangular bit is Rock, and this we are in is Great Campbell?"

"That's right!" said the Penn-keeper with an answering smile for the newly glowing face. "We shall make you busha (overseer) of Mafoota yet!"

"It is such a glorious land!" said Ellice dreamily. "Even when the rains come it will still be Summer—always Summer!"

"Rather say Spring—always Spring!"

"Why, Uncle Dick?"

"Because the sap is always rising, Ellie—the Earth never rests, never goes to sleep here. Her blood beats all the year round, and that's why you can't grow the northern trees. They do all right for a year or so, and then they get tired and want their Winter sleep. But the sap is always rising!"

Ellice drew a queer deep breath, and looked round her, without answering. They had left Great Campbell behind them, crossed Peenie and St. Lawrence, and were heading for Tom Tidler's Ground. The pasture through which they rode was uneven ground, but the rich Guinea grass brushed the horses' knees and tempted them to snatch a juicy mouthful. Most of the pastures at Mafoota were cleaned and sown with Guinea, or, in the marshy lowlands, Para,—St. Mary's and common grass being less costly to raise but less valuable as fodder for the mules. Dick Pryce was a man who neglected his home comforts rather than his profit-bearing land. The furniture went shabby in order that he might afford the best pasturage.

By and bye they struck the road again—the only one on

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Mafoota Penn, leading eventually to Anchovy—and went jogging along in the hot glare for a mile or so, the horses resenting the hard ground after the turf and sobering into a sulky walk; but when they cut through Plymouth and Eden to reach the rising ground of Boundary Common, Queenie needed no loosened rein to break into the swinging canter that had tightened to a gallop before they reached the top of the hill. By this time the sun was up full strength, and Ellice pushed the jippy-jappa from her hot forehead and swung the long plaits back over her shoulders before beginning the further descent.

“That’s Endeavour!” said Pryce, pointing to a lonely white house in the distance—a house that seemed as though all other things shunned its neighbourhood, for it stood out void of shelter, on a rising hillock, without outhouses or verandahs, a blank ugly building that would have been bleak in any less gracious climate.

“That’s Endeavour,” repeated Mr. Pryce grimly. “And it’s owned by the biggest blackguard roundabouts!”

“A white man?”

“No—a Nigger who calls himself white! He was busha to the old owner, Major Carter. The Carters had Endeavour since the first English settlers—long before the rising in ’37,—and they were hard up. You see, Endeavour was a sugar estate, and when the Bounties ruined the mill-owners Endeavour began to cost money instead of paying.”

“But that isn’t sugar down there, Uncle Dick—it’s far too dark! I do know as much as that!”

“No—it’s coffee and banana now. But it was sugar as long as Major Carter had it, and sugar at a dead loss. He tried other things once or twice, but they never paid—the Niggers saw to that! See here, Ellie, this present man—Platt—was Major Carter’s busha, and like all these d—d rascals he wanted

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the land for himself. So what does he do but work the property at a loss till his master gets discouraged and sells in small holdings. Then in comes Mr. Platt with his friends, and buys the pick of the estate. The minute it got into *his* hands it began to pay. It could have paid all along if he'd been honest."

"But, surely, it was partly Major Carter's fault for not looking after his own property!"

"Ah, that's the fault of the absent owner system, and attorneys and bushas and what not. But I don't suppose the poor devil could have told where the fault lay even if he'd been a resident. It wants some one brought up to the Penn to outwit the cunning of a Nigger. I'm my own busha, honey—and will be, unless I train you up to take my place!"

"I wish you could, Uncle Dick!" said Ellice gaily. "How I should like to be a boy and to manage Mafoota for you!"

"You might do some work for me even as you are, little girl—if you gave up skirts!" said the Penn-keeper with a dry glance at the habit. They were riding up the last pasture to the white house—stony ground littered with fowls and a family of young pigs, to say nothing of a lean yellow dog who growled at them and got a cut from Pryce's long whip. He showed his teeth, but slunk off, and they proceeded unmolested to the door, a narrow entry under a slab of stone that hardly kept out the sunshine. The absence of verandahs and the whitewash of the walls gave the place an undressed appearance that filled Ellice with a sense of squalor and distaste. The slipshod look of things seemed to her the outcome of the coloured owner having cheated Endeavour from a white man, and affected her as much as did Lily Scott's false beads and cheap finery.

Mr. Pryce disappeared into the dark gulf of the passage, leaving Ellice still in her saddle with the reins of both horses

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in her hands. She heard a sound of brief greeting, then his voice saying, "I brought my niece with me—may she wait in here?" and he emerged again to lift her from her saddle.

The house inside was as desolate as out. A bare stone-flagged passage, flanked by almost empty rooms and leading into a square hall something like that at Mafoota, but infinitely more dilapidated. It was furnished rather worse than the dingiest of London lodging houses, and Ellice picked up her habit from the dusty flooring and suspected actual dirt on the broken-down sofa where she was evidently expected to sit. In the gloom of the place, after the sunshine outside, she could hardly do more at first than outline a thick figure and a dusky face that she surmised was Mr. Platt. He was unmistakably a black man—far darker than George Saunders—and the curtness of Mr. Pryce's introduction—"My niece, Miss Honour-am,"—without mentioning Platt's name at all, seemed to Ellice to warrant no more than a civil "Good morning!" Her host bowed in the burlesque fashion of a stranger to such customs, and shifted uneasily on his broad feet until Pryce offhandedly asked to discuss his business in private, when they vanished into one of the empty front rooms.

Left alone, Ellice turned for distraction to the windows, for there was nothing in the forlorn hall to amuse her. There were no jalousies as at Mafoota, but a big wooden shutter was thrust outwards from the frame by means of a rough piece of wood, and beyond the aperture was a fresh vista of unkempt ground given over to practical profit in the shape of fowls, turkeys, and the pigs. Beyond this was a row of outhouses where she surmised a cow or so and horses and mules, and again as a background the plantations of coffee and banana. She had not before sampled a plantation worked solely for profit, without any effort after the graces of life, and she thought

it depressingly ugly. Endeavour might be rightly named, but it seemed to her a sordid effort.

After some twenty minutes she heard the door open and the men come into the passage. Then another step that she did not know joined them, as some one whom she could not see came in from the front of the house; but Mr. Pryce spoke to him in a more cordial tone.

"Good morning, Busha! It's some time since we came across each other."

A voice—a white man's voice—began to say something in reply as Ellice left the rickety sofa and walked into the passage to join Pryce. The sentence stopped, cut short in the midst, and the man addressed as Busha drew himself up against the wall, for the passage was not too wide for her to pass with three people already in it. As he did so he took off his hat, and she glanced up and thanked him. His big, shamed figure seemed somehow a stranger anomaly in the neglected house than the fowls straying over the doorstep of what had been a well-kept estate once upon a time. She looked at him more narrowly in the brief space at her disposal, and saw a tall man in a grey flannel shirt, long riding boots and breeches, and with a hard face—the sort of face that is shrewd with rigorous living and sour with disappointment rather than by natural tendency.

"Thank you!" she said again, more insistently.

He vanished into the dusk of the house as suddenly as he had appeared, and she passed on into the outer sunshine. A ragged Negro girl was holding the horses, and Pryce mounted Ellice himself, with a careless nod to his host as he swung into his own saddle and they turned their heads homewards.

"I hope you won't be tired, Ellie," he remarked. "I'm afraid it will be nearly eleven before we are at home again."

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"It doesn't matter a bit—I am not hungry," she said absently.

"If it had been anywhere but Endeavour they would have offered a lady some refreshment!" said the Penn-keeper disgustedly. "But I could not get you anything there."

"Oh, Uncle, I could not have eaten in such a house! Besides, that man——! Was your business satisfactory?"

"Oh yes. His wretched lean stock has been grazing in my further pastures, that's all, but I told him to keep it out of them! He thought I should never know on the other side of the Penn, and the brand being the same letter he hoped they would escape notice, I've no doubt!"

There was a silence for some time, filled with the odours of star-apple and mango and bruised grass beneath the horses' feet, all exhaling in the heat as though their juices were pressed out beneath a hot iron. Ellice seemed suddenly tongue-tied. Only as they neared Mafoota again did she ask a question—

"Uncle, who is the man you spoke to in the passage before we left?"

"Platt's busha—a man named Arbuthnott."

"But he's a white man!"

"Yes, poor devil! Platt has reversed the order of things very much at Endeavour. It is typical of Jamaica nowadays to see a black man in possession of the land, employing a white as his overseer, and it feeds the d—d conceit of the Nigger!" He laughed grimly. "Some day our black brother will show how he really looks on the English!"

But Ellice, being a woman, was more engrossed by the individual than by the generality instanced. "How dreadful—for Mr. Arbuthnott!" she said in simple wonder. And then with a certainty that she could not have explained, she added, "He is a gentleman, Uncle Dick."

CHAPTER V

"Goldilocks sat on the grass,
Tying up of posies rare;
Hardly could a sunbeam pass
Through the cloud that was her hair.
Purple orchis lasteth long,
Primrose flowers are pale and clear.
O the maiden sang a song
It would do you good to hear."

JEAN INGELow.

AT six o'clock, when the sun began to roll up the mist curtain from the panorama round Mafoota house, the bookkeepers came out booted and ready for the saddle, slouched on to the ponies' backs and rode away into the further pastures to see if any of the mares had dropped cubs in the night. There was no tending of the big mothers before the dropping; the kindly climate made the pastures a good enough stable, and the quaint, leggy cubs first saw the green world they were to inhabit without aid save of nature. But when the bookkeepers came riding round, and found the stock increased, whether it were mules or cattle, they drove the mothers and their young gently up to the stables, and there the cubs and the calves were dressed, cleaned of ticks, and divided from the mares and cows until feeding time. It was rather a pretty sight to watch the eager mothers pushing their way in, morning and evening, each cow or mare nosing out her young with an instinct truer than the knowledge of the men who herded them.

George Saunders was the best driver of the three. As Mr. Pryce had said, he never hustled his drove, and his placid

deliberation was not in the least disturbed by a desire to outdo his companions and get his work more forward than theirs. Jersey King's ambitions were apt to frustrate his intentions; but on the other hand he was a better man to send with stock to a buyer, or one of the local shows that the Agricultural Committees so courageously get up for the encouragement of the Penns in Jamaica. Jersey was too good a business man to overdrive cattle on a hard road and in the day's heat; and besides, he had no competition to tempt him on such an errand.

Ellice was beginning to gauge the capacities of her uncle's staff half unconsciously. They were not as young men to her, for she had still her latent horror of the Young Man as a sensual animal; but as her interest in the Penn awoke and increased she grew to regard the bookkeepers as so many valuable assets, and to class them accordingly. While her face and figure ripened in the warm eternal Summer, the mind behind them was expanding and feeling out for something to feed upon, just as her body fed upon the new nourishment of the material world round her. Sometimes she caught Dick Pryce watching her with his deeply set eyes, and noticed the tight corners of his lips relax into what was almost a smile of satisfaction. It puzzled her at first, and then made her start with a sense of change in herself—a consciousness of the rising sap in her own veins as well as in the vast green world.

The Summer never passes in Jamaica, but the months vary with sun and shade, and some slight degree of temperature. By May the wet season has begun, and all the days seem partially drowned in a gentle monotony of rain. It is not the down-pour, when all the Heavens threaten to empty themselves upon the earth, that brings floods, but the steady insistence of the higher grey skies for hours on hours. Then indeed Bragging Tom runs at Knockalva, and the Great River rises to

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the iron railing of Shettlewood House bridge. All three book-keepers and Dick Pryce himself were out day after day with anxious faces, driving the calves to the higher pastures, and racing the rains for the drowning cattle. But the early part of the day, even in August, was often fine, for it was only at midday that the great piles of grey wool came floating up over the hills and burst into sheets of water as thick as grey crêpe, blotting out the valley; and so whatever could be done in the morning hours was crowded into them, and the training and breaking of the yearling mules kept the younger men employed when not actually in the pastures. Ellice took to going down to the stables and the stockyard to see the lassoing, and the trimming up of some promising youngster who was for future sale, sometimes in place of her morning ride. A mule does not fetch its twenty odd pounds until it is three years old or over, but it is taken in hand and "broken" before that, and the process has a touch of savagery in the struggle between beast and man that need not yet be cruel.

When Ellice had learned that the world would be inaccessible beyond the verandah after noon, she was up and out all the earlier to take advantage of the bright treacherous morning; it was not much after six o'clock when she answered the Penn-keeper's summons one morning in full August, and came rushing out into the verandah. The former Ellice—the Ellice of the Female Relative days when her guardians stood to her for law—would never have rushed. She had hardly run even as a child, it being more decorous to walk; but the swaddling bands of her existence were all too small for the expanding body and mind which bloomed at Mafoota, and she caught up the jippy-jappa hat and ran to Mr. Pryce's whistle as eagerly as his dogs. He usually whistled when he wanted Ellice; it was a dear signal between them.

"Be quick, Ellie! Jersey and the boys are casting mules,"

he said briefly as she appeared. "Cut away to the stables, and don't go too near!"

Ellice waited for a hasty hug and took to her heels—down the green slope twinkling with dew, that fell away from the verandah, into the tough track worn by the horses' feet that was all the drive or pathway existing in the ground immediately round the house, and full into the bustle and life of the great yard, where the three bookkeepers and half a dozen black men were gathered together. The stables and the stable yard stood detached from the house, a long row of buildings permanently inhabited by the handsome American jackass and the great English bull, and also at intervals by the mares and the cows who were under some special treatment. There was plenty of room, besides the stalls, for the riding horses of the Penn.

"Morning!" said Jersey King as Ellice came up. He vouchsafed her no other greeting for the moment, and there was the glamour of authority upon him. With his long stock whip in his hand he stood at ease, giving instructions, and the rest of the men—even George Saunders and young Whitworth—listened docilely.

"Drive the three-year-olds up from Aquaduct, William," he said in the tones of the master. "And you pick out the biggest—those up to fourteen hands, Saunders. If you don't get them Bailey can cast instead."

"Is the boy to try?" Saunders asked a trifle sullenly, as if the suspicion cast on his powers with the lasso were hardly to his liking. He glanced at Ellice as he passed her to take up station, and his glance did not please her. It was lowering, persistent, almost personal. Within a short time since, the young men in her present life had bestowed scant notice on the supposed niece of their employer, but there was a quality in the ripening face and figure that they could understand and appreciate as they did Lily Scott's beauty.

“Good morning, Miss Honouram. If you want to watch the show you had better get under these trees here!” he lingered to say. The trees in question bordered the track flowing past the stables and out towards what were called the Home Pastures; between the track and the stables was the wide bit of common grass on which the casting was to take place,—beyond, the gate through which the mules would be driven up from Aquaduct. It was undoubtedly the best point of vantage, but Ellice hardly heeded him even as she thanked him and mechanically moved back to the spot, for her momentary attention was with Jersey King. We all have our Golden Hour, and this was the one most favourable to the young bookkeeper; as he stood in his long brown riding boots, rough breeches, and flannel shirt, his slight figure combined something of boyish suppleness and the vigour of manhood. What curly yellow hair he had! He was wearing no hat, for the sun was not dangerous as yet, but its beams caught the rings of his golden hair and made them soft and bright as a child’s. Ellice was hardly aware of her own interest as she looked at him, and certainly her deliberate judgment would not have borne it out. The man she had seen for a few seconds at Endeavour Penn, she had pronounced a gentleman—Jersey King, from their first acquaintance, she had unhesitatingly said was not. Yet for the moment, and because he was near to her in the glory of his young manhood, Jersey was more to her thoughts than the passing interest of Mr. Platt’s busha, whom she had never seen since. The whole scene lingered in her mind all her life as a vivid picture, with that one individuality in the foreground on which she did not otherwise waste a thought. The black men ran hither and thither at bidding—the gate through which William would drive his mules from Aquaduct was flung back—Jersey King stood easily, his coiled lasso in his hand, his boyish figure marked out against the green.

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"Morning!" said a full slow voice, and Ellice brought her absorbed eyes back with a consciousness of having been caught looking with interest at the young man—though she would have disdained the imputation. She had not noticed Lily Scott approach her, and was a little surprised to find her up so early, for Lily was more prone to lie abed until necessity forced her to a scrambling toilet, than to rise and come out with the sun. She was even now, to Ellice's distaste, a sloven in her dress, which suggested an old dressing-gown, a shawl wrapped over her shoulders to hide deficiencies, and heavy tousled hair thrust into a loose knob. Ellice tossed her own sleek head with a secret satisfaction to remember that she had coiled her shining hair as carefully for the day as she might have done just before she faced her public at breakfast.

"Good morning. The mules tempted you out then, Miss Scott? It is very early!" There was unconscious irony in Ellice's voice.

"Ye—es! It's fun to see them cast—my! but they do kick!" Lily was looking at Ellice with her curiously detached gaze. It seemed as if while her lips framed platitudes her magnificent gloomy eyes were seeking something much more subtle and abstract in the other girl.

"Do the men ever get hurt?" There was a gleam of pity in Ellice's face—pity for the boyish figure down there with its insolence of strength and beauty. She included all young manhood in Jersey King, open to risks of savage hoofs and teeth; but she looked, obviously, at the one within her range of vision.

Into Lily Scott's face came a gleam also—an ugly gleam of inherited instinct and unknown blood traits, that Ellice did not see, and would not have understood if she had seen. She was not looking at Lily Scott, and the housekeeper's reply—drawled even slower than usual—only reached her by its word meaning.

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"Saunders was laid up for a month last year. He's not quick enough—a cub lashed out at him when he was trimming it. And a man named James was lost in a stampede."

"Lost!" Ellice's horrified wide eyes asked the question.

"Killed."

"Ah!—I hope they will be careful!"

"I'd go and beg them to for my sake if I was as anxious as that!"—Lily Scott did not understand fine insinuation. She mocked out loud with a threatening face. But Ellice did not hear—she was watching a dark cloud sweeping up the further pasture with a man on horseback shepherding it like a little toy figure. On and on it came, and now it was a whirling, galloping mass of dark backs and coarse manes and tails—mules in their third year, well grown but unbroken, their size varying from under thirteen hands to fourteen. They dashed up through the open gate, thrusting each other aside to force the passage through, and then checked in the forward rush by the shouting and cracking whips of the men afoot, they wheeled a moment and stood, uncertain in which direction to charge, the centre of the herd close packed, those on the flanks still galloping loosely round with the force of their own rush.

"Pick out your mule and keep your eye on him!" shouted Jersey King, springing back to the gate of the stable yard. "Don't throw for any but your own. Now then, Bailey—you and I first!"

Bailey, a tall full-blooded Negro in loosely braced trousers and ragged shirt, fell back towards the trees where the girls were standing. Jersey faced him, the wide grass between, each man with a lasso coiled in hand. Then some one called "Go!" and once more as by an electric shock the mules were set in motion. As they came by at the gallop the wind of the fierce going made Ellice shiver, and the frightful impetus of the rush seemed as if it wedded dark shoulder to dark shoulder.

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She could see nothing but a moving pack of mules, but as the herd passed Jersey, he flung forward, sent his rope whirling over their heads and had caught a big fourteen-hands brute round the neck. The rope slipped neatly through his hands and allowed the captive to run as if free with his fellows until the men beyond the stables turned them again, parted them, broke the mass into small clumps of a dozen or so, and then caught the trailing rope, three of them hanging on and being dragged helplessly a few yards as the mule plunged.

"Well done! Jersey caught his first try, eh?" said the Penn-keeper at Ellice's elbow. He also had strolled upon the scene unnoticed.

"Yes!" she answered breathlessly. "Oh, do look at Bailey's rope—it is round a mule's nose!"

Bailey, less lucky than King, had only succeeded in catching his mule too short, and the noose had run up tight on the beast's nose, half stifling it. Before Jersey's capture could be attended to, the Penn-keeper with new alertness in his manner had ordered the releasing of Bailey's, and with some difficulty the animal was set free.

"Bailey is not generally such a fool—he is the best caster we have. But we can't lose a twenty-pound mule for his little mistakes," said Dick Pryce drily.

"How many are there in that drove, Uncle?"

"A hundred and fifty to two hundred, I expect. Look at King—he is going to trim his mule himself, especially for your benefit!"

Again the eyes of the housekeeper glinted at Ellice as Dick Pryce made his half joking remark; but she did not speak—only drew her shawl a little more closely about her shoulders and turned away from him and Ellice. The latter was again absorbed in King, who, with the aid of the black helpers, had at last brought the panting, struggling mule to a standstill and

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was cautiously approaching him step by step. Even now, with feet planted firmly and muscles braced to pull backwards, the animal was nearly master of the situation, though the noose round his neck was making him sob and pant. With deft strong fingers Jersey made a second noose at the end of the rope, slipped it over the mule's nose, but so that he could breathe, and then loosened the throttling collar with one practised twist. Then William brought him the shears, and standing well back from the planted forelegs that might plunge at any instant, he clipped the wild mane, and dared to snatch and crop the tail as well. It was well done, if with a trifle of bravado in the show, and the men applauded as well as Richard Pryce. Half a dozen beasts were lassoed in like manner—some at the second or third try—before the herd were driven back minus those selected, and Jersey King came up the slope where Ellice stood with shining eyes. He moved with the step of a conqueror, and laughed a little as he greeted them all.

"Well, Miss Honouram, what do you think of mule casting? Learned anything of Penn-keeping this morning?" His back was towards the other girl—Lily Scott—and perhaps he did not see the slovenly figure and the inflamed beauty of the face scowling at him. It is certain that Ellice did not, for her eyes were fixed half critically, half approvingly, on the young man as he spoke—the slight figure in the flannel shirt whose collar was opened for the heat of his late exertions, showing the swell of his brown throat and the muscular breast. For such a fair man he burned easily—the forehead under the damp rings of gold hair was brick red.

"It was—splendid!" said Ellice, her laugh as impulsive as the words. "Is there more of the breaking in?"

"Rather! We shall have our hands full with those gentry we have clipped. It will take days before we can get them to look at a bridle."

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"I wish I could throw a rope as you do, Mr. King!"

"I'll teach you—with pleasure!"

The last words qualified the assurance of the first as Dick Pryce turned from a brief conversation with William and fixed his keen, inscrutable eyes on the younger man's hot face.

"Training for busha, eh, Ellie?" he said carelessly. "Come along to breakfast now—and you'd better go and wash the sweat off, my boy!" he added to Jersey.

Ellice slipped her hand into the Penn-keeper's arm and turned with him, her light feet dragging him forward a little beyond his leisurely tread, her voice asking eager questions that made him laugh. Behind them, Lily Scott, her shawl held tightly across her breast with clenched hands, followed with Jersey King; but they turned aside below the verandah and went in by a side door to finish their respective toilets. As they went Ellice caught the raised, coarser tones of the housekeeper's voice, and wondered if she were "nagging" the bookkeeper as she did the servants. "How foolish!" she thought, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. "Men hate being nagged." But she could not disentangle their words on this occasion, though it reminded her of her first introduction to the household when Jersey King had pronounced judgment on her as "deadly slow." He had not thought her slow to-day! A revelation of an alteration in herself read in the young man's vivid blue eyes suddenly made her gasp a little.

She sat down with Dick Pryce without waiting for the others. Perhaps a certain reluctance was on her for more of Mr. King's society than was necessary, after her momentary flash of intuition. He interested her, as a man, not at all; but she could not prevent the new blood quickening in her veins at the knowledge of having triumphed over his first impression—not

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because it was anything to her that he should alter his opinion, but because it proved her own womanhood. The sap was rising—always rising—in the good green world outside the old house at Mafoota. It stirred a little in Ellice's torpid youth.

Breakfast and meals in general were no longer a horror to her since she had practically taken over the superintendence of the kitchen. For a succession of greasy dishes had at last driven her from her diffidence of Lily Scott to seeking that young person in her own littered room upstairs and meekly proposing an improvement.

"If I might show Mary, I believe I could teach her some new dishes—you must be so worried with the limits up here—it must be so difficult to get things!" was all she ventured at first.

Lily Scott, lounging in the soiled wrapper that her soul loved, looked up with wonderful eyes that had been intent on a flashy blouse in an illustrated paper. She stared with all their expressionless beauty, and gave an empty laugh.

"You may teach her anything you like for all I care! It's blinding hot in the kitchen, as you'll find!"

But Ellice grasped at the permission even so ungraciously given, picked her way through leaves of fashion books and old scraps of former dressmaking, and vanished kitchenwards there and then. Since that hour there had been less grease in the soup, and the chickens had shown a wholesome brown roast, while the bread was no longer sodden three days of the week. Ellice possessed the administrative talent at least, and could make even the grinning Negresses do as she told them—a gift never even surmised by the housekeeper, who (as Ellice discovered) had directed the kitchen by sitting on one of the dirty wooden benches laughing and gossiping with the servants for idle pleasure. Since she had discovered this fact Ellice

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had ceased to pity her for enforced association with the Blacks.

This morning there were scrambled eggs for breakfast, crisp toast, home-made bread, honey, and plenty of fruit. Ellice had not yet extended her influence to the table linen of the establishment, and all that there was of a cloth was a coarse strip of linen running down the centre of the table. She could only hope that by and bye she might be allowed to send to Kingston for something better, or rummage in the old cupboards and presses of Mafoota house. At present she contented herself with the clean cooking. Mr. Pryce had never commented on the alteration of his cuisine, if he noticed it; but his eyes twinkled more than ever. He looked at Ellice this morning in a way she did not see—a queer half-quizzical way that was a little sad, too; but he did full justice to the eggs before he said anything, and when he did speak his words made her jump and flush uncomfortably.

“Written your home letter for this Mail, Ellie?”

Of all details in the part she was playing Ellice could least justify the letters that she wrote to England to Eleanor’s people. For it had been of course necessary to write to them after all excuses of fever and “leaving it to Uncle Dick” had been worn out. She had plenty of the real Eleanor’s handwriting at her disposal to copy, and knew enough of her home life not to blunder; but the ugly side of her deception was never softened to her mind, and she condemned herself even while she still kept up the fraud. Fortunately for her conscience Eleanor had been an orphan like herself, with only one married sister and an aunt to expect news from her. Even to practise a deception upon them was alien enough to Ellice, and if her daily increasing desire to remain at Mafoota had not made her desperate, conscience and principle would have made such a course impossible for her. As it was she thrust scruples

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aside for the time being, and indited the briefest letters that she could, pleading the new life—so much to do and see—anything—as excuses for longer epistles. It seemed a fatally easy deception, too; just as in the first instance no one had questioned her identity, so in this case no one questioned her imitation of Eleanor's rather characterless handwriting, for the present at any rate. Only one or two letters had, however, passed between her and the Honourams at present, owing to the distance between them, and when Mr. Pryce put his question she shivered at the thought of the reluctant task before her.

"I haven't done so yet, Uncle Dick."

"Well, you'll have to hurry up, little girl. The Mail goes on Thursday and Saunders must take the letters to Montpelier in case the rains stopped them. We were flooded last year, and couldn't get past the Blue Hole. Better write this afternoon when you can't get out."

"Very well!" said Ellice despondently. But she did not feel the more inclined even when the lovely distance began to be shadowed with purple, and the clouds gathered over the noonday sky, shutting out the sun and making the world dark with rain. Something of what Noah saw from his Ark upon the water must this be, Ellice thought, standing at the open door that afternoon to watch the grey crêpe veil drawn over the stables until they were indistinguishable from the house, and the whole earth was blotted out. Rain—and rain—and rain; it looked as if it could never cease and brighten to a perfect morning again. Yet she had seen this miracle for over a month. The rain had driven her back from the verandah and was beating on the solid roofing with the rushing sound of a waterfall. She turned listlessly from the blank prospect to the deserted hall, for the men were out and Lily Scott upstairs in her own untidy domains. Somewhere in the kitchens Ellice could hear the black people singing with cheerful monot-

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only one verse of a song which they repeated over and over again, without variation, and little sense,—

“Now when I wake in de mornin’
Don’t ’get my coffee early
And if I want any money
I’ll run up in my writing desk!”

Then other voices chimed in—

“Rubber rubber rubber rubber rub, rub-a-rub.
Rub rub-a-rub!
Rub rub-a-rub!
Rubber rubber rubber rubber rub, rub-a-rub!
I’ll run up in my writing desk!”

“There must be a dozen people in the kitchen!” thought Ellice, sauntering across the hall. “I believe the stablepeople crowd in under excuse of the wet. Miss Scott ought to see to it! It always means extra food.”

She had reached the passage leading to her own room, which way lay also duty and the writing table. But in a vain hope of any hindrance she paused at the rough shelf by the cupboard door under the stairs, and fingered a row of unpromising books standing there. There was a history of Jamaica, an old Diary marked 1822, a book on the diseases of cattle, and a ledger-looking volume without any title. This last Ellice pulled out and opened, simply because it did not betray itself on the back, and discovered it to be in manuscript, seemingly the entries of cattle and stock made many years since. In the dim light she could hardly decipher the yellowed ink, but she carried it across to the old basket chair, and sitting down with the book on her knees, faced the rainy day.

“List of slaves on old Mafoota Estate, this first day of January 1827.” Then followed a list, carefully divided by ruled lines, of this human property, names, colour, age, nationality, occupation, condition, and price, with a final space for

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"remarks" which puzzled Ellice more than all. Certainly the bookkeepers of nearly a century ago had been painstaking in their details! Ellice sat with the book on her knees and deciphered the yellow writing in the sullen light of the leaden sky. She was trying to realise that years ago Mafoota had been a slave-plantation before it had become a harmless Penn—Mafoota, the good green land she loved, that smiled bondlessly for Black and White alike nowadays, and where toil was paid for, but not the toilers. It was the mules and the cattle that were the slaves to-day, and to her sense of educated horror the human slaves of yesterday were barely credible.

"William Thompson—Negro—aged 71—African. Watchman. Weakly," read Ellice carefully, a picture of the old Negro rising before her mind—too weakly for any work but that of a watchman, and his price only ten pounds! "Ginger Scott. Sambo" (What degree of colour did Sambo mean?), "aged 66. Creole. Invalid. Very weakly and sickly and has sore on one foot." Oh, this list was sickening! She burned for Wilberforce and the Emancipation. Hitherto Ellice had retained the heroic theories of those bred afar from black labour, and even her short experience of the Negro in the kitchens of Mafoota had only filled her with irritation of which she was half ashamed. These people were just as good as herself—at least, just as good as their own corresponding class among white people. She distinguished herself from equality even with George Saunders and Arnold Whitworth by the sophistry of saying that none of the bookkeepers at Mafoota were gentlemen.

After a few minutes of steady reading she turned the pages in search of the younger men. Here they were, coopers, carpenters, labourers on the farm—a whole army of them.

"Philip Scarlett. Negro. Aged 29. Creole. Mason. Able. £160. Willy David"—the last two words added

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under "remarks." Apparently the said "Willy David" had some influence for ill or good on the report of Philip Scarlett.

"George Traile. Sambo. Aged 28. Creole. At farm. Has King's Evil. £100."

"Robert Barnett. Negro. Aged 24. Creole. Carpenter. Able. £120. Nancy Frost." (Why Nancy Frost?) Etc. It seemed an endless list, down to the children—George River. Negro. Aged 12. Creole. Third Class. Healthy. £80.—Henry 2nd. Quadroon. Aged 8. Creole. Unemployed. Sickly. £40. Catherine Price.—Thomas Macfaddon. Mulatto. Aged 7. Creole. House boy. Healthy. £40. Sarah Brysett."

The blood rose to Ellice's head in her stooping over the book, and the surprised indignation of realizing that these hundreds of men and women—nearly a thousand in all—were treated as animals, just stock, more or less valuable, like the mules. In her absorption she did not hear the sound of an arrival, or the slipping of a horse's hoofs on the wet grass; she was trying to grasp the position of the Black and the White which made such a list as that of the old Mafoota stock-book possible. Though of course, amended English Ellice, there is this essential difference now: that no one looks on these people as of no account! She turned at last to the women and girls—well, they ranked last on the list, though their prices, oddly enough, rose higher at an earlier age.

"Mary Kemp. Negro. Aged 38. Creole. First class. Weakly. £160."

"Betty Ellis. Negro. Aged 38. First Class. Absent. A Runaway."

"Mary Anne Frost. Negro. Aged 38. Creole. First Class. Healthy. Pregnant at present."

Ellice closed the book with an instinct on that last entry made so rawly by a man, for she was at last conscious of an approach-

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ing presence. Some one was coming along the verandah, and with her face flaming over the book she looked up to see who. It was not one of their own bookkeepers; the figure in the soaked mackintosh and sodden hat was too tall and broad for the immature manhood at Mafoota, save that of Dick Pryce himself. It was—she knew him in a moment—Mr. Platt's busha from Endeavour Penn.

The man—Arbuthnott they had called him—stopped with a slight embarrassment at the unexpected vision in the doorway, and raised his hat. Ellice remembered the same action in the grim passage at Endeavour. She had not taken in his face with any detail then; now she saw that he was an ugly man, with very dark hair. Yet his emphatic absence of Anglo-Saxon colouring left him more English than Jersey King, somehow. He was undeniably dark—but his skin was not sallow, and his features could never, never resemble George Saunders' or Arnold Whitworth's.

On his side Arbuthnott saw the first white woman he had set eyes on for months without suspecting her pedigree, and whose face in the passage at Endeavour had startled him by its fairness. As he came in from the gloomed and dripping world without, the last vision he expected was this slight girl with the clean white skin and honest northern eyes sitting in a shabby basket chair directly in his path, barring the entrance to Mafoota. Her silken head was bent very earnestly over an old account book on her knee before she raised it and saw him—he noticed the gloss on the golden hair, and also that it was coiled closely at the nape of her neck to-day instead of hanging in two long plaits like Gretchen's. He had time to see this with his quiet eyes before she collected herself and spoke with much composure.

"Good afternoon!—It is Mr. Arbuthnott, isn't it, from Endeavour? Did you want to see my uncle?"

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"I hoped to catch him in, as it is so wet. Surely he is not away in the pastures?"

"No, he is in his room—he often goes there after lunch since the rains began. I believe," said Ellice with a wise little smile, "that he goes to sleep! He is supposed to be busy, and nobody disturbs him."

"I see. Then when he wakes will the servants say that I am here, please? If I may leave my mackintosh in the kitchen—"

Ellice gave a little cry of distress. "I am so sorry! Please take it off at once, and I will tell Uncle Dick now—of course it does not matter disturbing him, really! I am sure he can find you some dry clothes, too—you must be wet through, and the boys' things would be too small." She glanced at his large figure which he was divesting of the dripping mackintosh, and smiled again at an inward vision of Jersey King's coat not reaching to those muscular wrists.

"I am not wet enough for that—no, please!" He made two steps to the kitchen door, handed his mackintosh and hat in to somebody with a brief order, and sauntered back to the doorway where the girl still lingered. "Don't disturb Mr. Pryce for a few minutes, please!" he said with an insistence in his voice that puzzled her a little. "You don't know what an honour it seems to have a lady to speak to!"

She looked up with a new sympathy in her eyes to remember her own surprise in saying that he was a gentleman. A memory of Endeavour and all its sordid ugliness, its loneliness of situation, rose up before her also. She sat down again in the chair and looked doubtfully at his clothes.

"Supposing you get fever!"

"I shall not—here. This is not a fever district. The last place I was in was much more dangerous."

"Yes? Where did you come from?"

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"I came from a country which is called *Look Behind!*" His eyes, wandering away from her face, lost themselves in the grey blank beyond the verandah. Whatever he saw, it was not the rain. The next instant his glance had come back to her and the book she held on her knee. He touched it, smiling whimsically.

"Are you studying for a busha?"

"Perhaps. I am very interested in everything about the Penn, I love it so!" Her eyes had the look that the view brought into them when each morning she said her prayers before it on the verandah. "But I cannot understand all this,"—she turned the thick stiff leaves of parchment. "Surely it can't be true!"

"What can't be true?"

"That they treated men and women like this—that the black people were no better than cattle!"

He looked at her attentively. Between sunburn and the flush of her excitement her face was like a rose. He did not find the features insignificant, or the blue-grey eyes expressionless. The crown of her hair was as rare as fine gold. Surely she was a queen, and—thank God!—a white woman!

"Do you think so much of the coloured people?" he asked slowly.

"I think they are human beings!"

"Oh!—so are we all." He shrugged his shoulders. "Show me what you cannot understand," he said.

But with the last brazen entry in her mind Ellice declined to open the leaves, and spoke from memory.

"What does 'Sambo' mean, under the heading of colour?"

"A cross between a mulatto and Negro—rather darker than a Mulatto."

"Oh," said Ellice with an innocence that appalled her hearer. "I suppose there were many races or tribes of African

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Negroes originally, or perhaps they intermarried with the Aborigines?"

"There are coolies imported from India, you know!" he stammered. "They have intermarried with the Niggers—and—and possibly the white people—at some time."

His voice dropped before the direct gaze of her blue-grey eyes. Was it possible that she was so ignorant?

"I am sure the white emigrants, even years ago, would never have married with the Negroes," she said positively. "Racial feeling would be against it even in a less civilised age, don't you think? And beside, they were simply slaves! They could only marry amongst themselves!"

He was dumb. This colossal ignoring of human nature, except under the sanction of law, left him no power of explanation. Fortunately Ellice went on with her catechism, having settled the Universe to her own conviction.

"And what is a Creole? Is that a degree of colour also?"

"Oh no—Creole simply means a person born in the Island, whatever their race. I expect you find 'African or Creole' at the head of a column, eh?"

"Yes!"

"The Africans were the slaves imported straight from Africa—the Creoles those born here, in captivity."

(She remembered that "Pregnant" against Mary Anne Frost's name and rushed into another subject.)

"Why do they add another name under the heading of 'Remarks,' quite different to the slave's own?"

"It merely means the father or mother as a rule. Possibly in the case of a male slave it might mean the woman he had married."

"It reads like the pedigree of cattle!" she exclaimed horrified.

"Well, they were cattle to the old planters—I am afraid you cannot get away from it."

She drew a long breath of shame. "It seems so awful, doesn't it! Can you conceive of our regarding human beings so lightly now!"

Again that nonplussed expression crossed his face, and for the moment he seemed as taken back as if faced with a personal accusation. He recovered himself with some sort of an effort.

"If you look at that old Jamaican Diary I once saw on Mr. Pryce's shelf you will get a better idea of the temper of the times in 1820. There's an entry there referring to Wilberforce's first attack on the Slave Trade in the English Parliament, and the opinion of him and it amongst the planters here! You will find it a revelation."

Ellice did not answer, for a cheery whistle sounded from the back regions of the house, and the Penn-keeper lounged into view through the doorway by the staircase. He did not show any surprise at Arbuthnott's presence, but greeted him with the offhand cordiality always awaiting guests at Mafoota.

"I've come about that horse that strayed into your pastures," said Arbuthnott, with a dark flush suddenly reddening his skin. He spoke as one who needs must, but is ashamed of his errand. "If it was only one night, we owe you a shilling, legally. Mr. Platt is positive the beast could not have been there longer."

"All right, my boy—all right." Ellice smiled a little at the term as applied to Arbuthnott; there was little of the boy in his hard, weather-stained face. "I don't suppose Mr. Platt will suffer in the transaction, anyhow!" Dick Pryce remarked drily. "Whoever loses *he* manages to save his skin! Come into my room and change those wet things of yours, Busha. And you run up and tell my housekeeper there's another man to tea, Ellie—she'd better come down and see to it!"

Ellice found Miss Scott asleep, lying on the shabby couch amongst the fashion papers. As she had not troubled to clear

it first she was literally lying amongst them, her untidy head resting on a crumpled page of Butterick, and her feet half covered with Weldon. There was some sort of trouble or disturbance even in her sleeping face, and the black brows gathered into a frown as soon as she was sufficiently awake to recognise Ellice.

"I'll come down!" she said more briskly than usual when she realised the message. "Platt's busha, did you say? He's never seen me!"

She did not say, as a plainer woman might, "I have never seen him," and Ellice, recognising the feminine reason for the speech, felt a vague sense of irritation. There was nothing in Lily Scott to her hasty judgment but a sensual vanity—though she did not put it in such an ugly fashion even to herself. But as she glanced at her sleepy loveliness she felt disgustedly that she had probably proved the truth of her tacit boast many a time—and that men did not notice sordid details as a frame to actual beauty.

Lily rose from the sofa with some degree of energy, as if the presence of a strange man acted on her like a stimulant. She crossed the room, and caught up a limp fall of cotton hanging over a piece of furniture that it had effectually shrouded. Then Ellice saw that the cotton was a muslin skirt—pinky red, the colour of a pale hibiscus out there in the rain-sodden garden—and that the piece of furniture it had covered was a cottage piano. She had not known that Lily owned a piano, and raised her brows slightly at the selection of music probable from Miss Scott. A feeling of homesickness rushed over her too, at the sight of the black and gold case and the stained keys. The instrument was in ill repair, but it recalled a lost civilization,—not the unregretted primness of the life she had led, but the few good things in it—music, books, pictures, that had been allowed her as legitimate pleasures. As Lily hastily

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retired into her bedroom to array herself in the becoming red cotton, Ellice walked up to the piano as if drawn without her will and began to play a soundless tune on the stained keys. It was the air of the little song that Eleanor had sung, and which had haunted her on her journey to Mafoota—

“Oh the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love!
Wherever the sun shines, the waters flow.
It hurts the snowdrop, it hurts the dove,
God on His throne, and man below.”

Ellice turned abruptly from the instrument as the sound of voices echoed in the room below. She crossed the bare room quickly and ran downstairs, her feet echoing loudly on the steps for all their lightness. The old boards creaked, too—the third stair from the top in particular. It seemed to her a noisy stairway.

In the inner hall were gathered the five men—the book-keepers and Uncle Dick augmented by Arbuthnott. Ellice slipped demurely into her seat by the Penn-keeper and began to eat her tea, but it was some minutes after that Lily Scott appeared—Lily in the limp red cotton, guiltless of collar, her bare throat taking a yet more soiled appearance from the large row of false pearls round it: yet Lily triumphantly lovely, with sleepy languorous eyes fixed on the one man at the table who had not yet seen her—and succumbed.

“It’s awfully lonely over at Endeavour, isn’t it, Mister Arbuthnott?” she drawled in her loud voice, as soon as Dick Pryce had made them known to each other.

“Very,” said the busha with brief emphasis. “To-day’s ride over, even in the rain, was a pleasure that outdid the duty!”

Ellice lifted her eyes stealthily at the deliberate flattery, to see if Lily Scott had succeeded so soon. She felt a little sorry, less from personal vanity than from a regret that Arbuthnott’s

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taste should be on the same level as other men's. She had hoped him less elementary.

But the busha was not looking at Lily Scott. His inscrutable eyes were gazing straight across the table, and met Ellice's own in consequence. With a sense of shock she felt as if he had spoken straight to her. The blood rose faintly to her sun-kissed cheeks again, and her eyes greatened with a surprise at herself. Was it possible that he found her more attractive—less "dull!"—than the acknowledged beauty of Mafoota!

"Let me give you some more honey, Miss Honouram. You're forgetting your tea in a daydream—I'll give you a penny for you thoughts if you will tell me them!" said Jersey King's voice at her ear, almost the same instant. He also had not forgotten the attraction of his neighbour's morning face and shining tresses. But Ellice with sudden shyness turned to Richard Pryce.

"I have not got through my home letter even yet, Uncle Dick," she said, ignoring the rest of the company. "After tea I shall have to go into my own room and really settle down to it."

Dick Pryce's eyes danced under their penthouse brows. He possessed a power of quiet observation that afforded him much entertainment at the expense of the humanity in his immediate neighbourhood. "That's right, Ellie!" he said soberly. "Nothing like shutting yourself up, eh, like a nun in a convent, if you want to get anything done. Then I'm afraid we shan't see anything more of you until supper?"

Ellice was conscious of another distracting whisper at her ear, "Don't go—you needn't be all that time, anyhow!" from Jersey King, and of Arbuthnott's hard gaze across the table. It occurred to her that he was more incredulous than depressed, and for a moment she had a subtly feminine desire to prove to him that she could deny herself to any company that

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she chose—the next she regretted leaving him exposed to all the armoury of Lily Scott's flagrant glances. And then it happened that a chance movement of her own made her aware of something that she wore hidden, hanging round her neck on a thin black cord—the sharp edge of a little gold circlet, pressing her white breast. All the blood seemed to leave her face and fly to her heart at the sudden warning of the past that clogged her steps. Her wedding ring had always seemed to her a repellent thing because of what it had involved—now for the first time it had the suggestion of a fetter—a barrier to freedom of thought as well as action. She laid her left hand cautiously upon the bosom of her white gown and pressed it until she felt the ring cut and bruise her flesh, with as fierce a desire for penance as any poor penitent of old. What right had she to think for a passing moment, even of the wandering glances of other men! That her husband had so broken his marriage vows had, curiously perhaps, made them more rigidly binding to Ellice—possibly from her very desire for superiority to him. She had no right to enter into competition with Lily Scott, even in vaguest thought. Arbuthnott—Jersey King—were as nothing to her. With a sudden hardening of her young face she rose quietly from the table and went away to her own room as she had suggested.

The man Arbuthnott, sitting opposite with steady watching eyes, saw the curious little action of the girl's hand pressed on her breast and saw also the strange alteration in the expression of her face, out of which all youth seemed to have died. A new interest had quickened his perception, but he took an unsolved problem away with him from Mafoota.

CHAPTER VI

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn."

D. G. ROSSETTI.

WHETHER it were her study of the old slave list of Mafoota that put it into her brain Ellice could not decide, but she awoke the following night from a nightmare haunted by black faces. She dreamed that she was being buried alive in the upper room—the untidy room over her head where Lily Scott sewed shabby finery—by innumerable slaves, who carried baskets of mould on their heads and flung them down over her. She heard the incessant soft tramp of their feet coming up the stairs, saw each grinning face as it appeared at the angle of the staircase, and listened for the creak of the last three steps that she had noticed herself in descending them. When the final basketful was about to be emptied on her face, which would shut out the light of day and stifle her, she tried to shriek—and woke wet with terror.

For a few minutes she lay still, trembling and trying to realise that the vivid dream was only a dream, and that she was safe in her own bed, a century removed from the vengeful black people. And then as she lay she became aware that she had really heard the stairs creak and that the same stealthy noise that she had noticed on her first arrival was being repeated. Some one was going up those stairs to the upper rooms! Who could it be? Was there a ghost at Mafoota, or—more probable

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and hardly less horrid to her night-fearing mind—did the black people slip about the house as they pleased when every one was asleep? For a minute Ellice thought of rising and calling Uncle Dick, but the idea of meeting somebody or something unexpected in those great bare rooms and passages packed with night, was too horrible. She pulled the sheet over her head, and shivered into quiet again. And then, without intention, fell really asleep and slept till morning without a dream.

In the glow of the treacherous sunshine that succeeded the previous wet day she forgot all about her terror, nor did the incident recall itself to her mind until a month or so later, when the same thing was repeated. She dreamed the same dream, though less vividly and with less detail, and woke again to hear the soft footfall and the stairs creak. This time the impression remained with her sufficiently to recur to her mind during the daylight hours, and provoked a side issue, though she avoided a direct reference for fear of being laughed at.

The rains had by this time given way to the drier season, and the end of November was begining to bring visitors to the seaports. But of that they knew nothing up in the green silence of the hills, and the Montpelier Hotel would not be open for the regular influx of tourists until January, when the owner of the double estates was in residence again at Shettlewood. Ellice had been nine months at Mafoota—nine uninterrupted months in which to heal mind and body and to expand into new life—but she had never ridden the same route of her arrival, and shunned the connection with civilization suggested by the railway. As the fine weather grew more settled, however, she took her morning rides again, and even when the Penn-keeper could not accompany her she would have Queenie saddled and go out alone to wander about the rich pastures and the wide common lands which she was

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ginning to know as well as any labourer on the estate. She had never tired of Mafoota—"the ineffable green land" as Stevenson might have phrased it—and the nine months' solitude had not yet become monotonous. To be sure, there was no one to talk to save Uncle Dick, for the rest of the household did not count beyond the commonplaces of every day, such as one offers to servants and other officials; but she had her books with her, packed at the bottom of her trunk for intended solace in that tête-à-tête with her husband which she had needlessly dreaded. And when she was not out of doors, or reading, or "talking stock" with Uncle Dick, she could paint, or work, or use the piano as Lily Scott never did. Lily had no objection to clearing the dressmaking accessories off the instrument as long as Ellice acknowledged its ownership, and did not suggest it being transferred from her untidy quarters, downstairs. Had she done this the housekeeper would have contended the innovation violently, but so long as Ellice played by her permission she plumed herself on granting the favour, and raised no objection. At first she listened with some curiosity to the Englishwoman's performance; but she yawned openly at Chopin, and Grieg was an inevitable cue for her to drift out of the room—down to the kitchens as Ellice suspected, where the gossip of the Penn was more to her taste than Ellice's music, and all the songs she wanted to be obtained by the endlessly repeated verse that had no continuation—

"Oh, when I wake in de mornin'
Don't 'get my coffee early—
And when I want any money
I'll run up in my writin' desk!"

Lily's own knowledge of the piano consisted of certain chords which she thumped out in perfect time and rhythm as an accompaniment to her voice. She could only sing two songs, of which one was "White Wings" and the other an anomalous lament

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that Ellice had never heard before, and she performed them both with a staccato effort that suggested that her voice was not naturally as she produced it. Her acquirement of the piano was a mystery to Ellice, after her discovery of these limits, until at last wonder drove her into inquiring of Uncle Dick. They were sitting side by side on the front or north verandah when she put the question, the Penn-keeper puffing at a big Jamaican cigar and stretching his long legs after his day's work. The warm darkness of the verandah after supper was the inevitable background to their talk, and Ellice would have resented it as an intrusion had one of the bookkeepers or Lily Scott come to join their evening chatter. But the younger men went as regularly to the east verandah, out of earshot, chaffing Lily or talking amongst themselves, and Ellice sat contentedly in her rocking chair at the Penn-keeper's big elbow, following the smoke as it curled upwards from the cigar or watching with affectionate eyes the old man's dim profile against the night sky. It was an hour for confidences, and she usually reserved her questions for a time such as this. There had been silence for some minutes between them when she lowered her voice in a query that made the Penn-keeper almost start.

"Uncle Dick, did you give Miss Scott her piano?"

"I believe I paid for it, anyway, and had it put up in her room for her," said Mr. Pryce thoughtfully, turning an amused face towards the eager head almost brushing his shoulder as Ellice leaned forward.

"But *why* did you give it to her? Did she ask you for it?"

"Said she'd like to have it, I believe."

"But she can't play!" Ellice's voice was blank. "She can hardly finger her notes!"

"Perhaps she thought she'd like to learn. It was a whim, I daresay."

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"Well, she never has learned! She has picked out a few chords somehow, and—and that's all!"

"Ah! Darned lazy girl, Lily. She doesn't stir herself much, does she, little one?"

"N—no—" Ellice was still too puzzled to be drawn into comments on Lily Scott. "Uncle Dick, I do wonder *why* you gave it to her! Did she tell you she could play?"

"Don't remember her saying so."

"Did she worry you for it?"

"Can't say she did, honey!"

"Well! Do the Penn-keepers generally give their house-keepers a piano, or—anything they may fancy for a whim? Would you give Mr. King a billiard table if he asked for it, Uncle Dick?"

"That's a bigger order, Ellie! But I don't say I mightn't try to fix up something of the kind if it were feasible and the boys were set on it."

There was a silence while Ellice tried to digest her amazement, and to find some deeper reason. Then out of the darkness came Pryce's voice, speaking gently.

"Look here, honey—how can I explain it to you? It's a bit dull up here at Mafoota for a girl, don't you think? Seeing no one, going nowhere, the nearest neighbour eight miles off (Shettlewood don't count—they wouldn't come to us) and nothing to do but look after the house and hear about the Penn year in, year out?"

"I don't feel it dull, Uncle Dick! I've been here nine months to-morrow."

"I know, Ellie—I've not forgotten!" The big knotted hand stole out in the darkness and found the girl's little fingers, that were so much harder and firmer than nine months ago from their grip on the reins and their grip on life. "Getting on for a year since I saw your little white face coming in to me under

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that doorway! . . . Neither chick nor child of my own," said Dick Pryce musingly. "Only just this golden-haired little lady brought me by good chance. We've been good friends, haven't we, Ellie, just as I told you we should?"

"Yes, Uncle Dick!"

The breathless voice was close to his grizzled head, and the girl leaned her fair face against his shoulder with a movement more explicit than words. He gathered her to him gently as he went on talking, in the low confidential tone she liked.

"And it doesn't matter what's said between us, Ellie. Well there, I'll tell you. You see, I gave the girl a piano because I hoped it might be a harmless toy for her—something to amuse her at times. See?"

"I—think so!"

"All toys aren't harmless up here, my honey, and I'd be glad if the boys had any fancy for music or anything of that kind. But they haven't. It's smoke—smoke—smoke—and hang round the native quarters, all the time. That's where the mischief comes in in this life—what the Hell are they to do once work's over? There's no society—no sport—no distraction of any kind. And we don't encourage drinking and gambling at Mafoota!" he added grimly.

"I see. Perhaps it is hard on the boys—somehow I didn't think. But—"

"It's harder still on the girl! Mafoota doesn't bore you, Ellie, even after nine months, because you've brains and energies to put into something, and the Penn happens to be the new outlet you've been hunting all your youth—eh? And you've things to fill in your day with, too—your painting and your books and half a dozen things. Never was such a busy little girl! But Lily Scott's a very different sort."

"I wasn't comparing myself to her!" said Ellice a trifle hastily.

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"No—you don't feel as if you hailed from the same port, do you—either with Lily or the boys?" Even in the darkness she guessed the twinkle in his eyes and her face flamed.

"I didn't mean to be a—snob!" she confessed.

"You're not a snob, honey—I'm only teasing you. You feel the difference between blood stock and half breed, eh? But it's hard on that girl and on Jersey King, for they've got to feel it too, you know!"

Ellice wriggled uncomfortably in the encircling arm. "Well, Uncle, I suppose they weren't very well educated—or brought up—or something." She stumbled amongst her own words. "Perhaps it couldn't be helped—out here."

"It's not education in Jamaica," said Uncle Dick thoughtfully. "It's colour!"

"*What!*" Ellice raised her head from his shoulder abruptly, and tried to see his face. "You mean Mr. Saunders? But Mr. King is—is white! And Miss Scott is only a brunette—surely!" Her voice was breathless again.

The Penn-keeper strangled a laugh. "She ought to thank you, Ellie! But 'brunette' falls rather short of poor Lily—eh? Her mother was a full-blooded Black!"

"Uncle Dick—how horrible!"

The girl gasped as she flung her head back against his shoulder, her northern eyes staring at the tropic night she did not see—dwelling in fancy on the beautiful dark face and the langourous airs of the young housekeeper. There was nothing of the Negress, as Ellice innocently conceived her, in Lily—nothing obvious, that betrayed her to the English girl. A subtle thickness of the features, a rich brown skin that had simply seemed to her a southern colouring, dull coarse hair almost black, and those lovely *animal* eyes!—yes, with a shudder she looked back and applied the adjective but too often to Lily Scott with the new revelation. She was a superb animal,

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loving to lie in the sun, to leave civilization alone and to trust to Nature for cleanliness as well as health, enjoying food and sleep—the adornment of her person the only human instinct which she seemed to possess highly developed, and even that might be a subtly animal impulse. Ellice in her horror struggled against the truth.

“But, Uncle Dick, she is not black—she is nearly white—she has European eyes! How *can* she have black blood!”

The tone of Uncle Dick’s reply sounded a little odd.

“Well—her father was white, you see.”

“And he married a Negress!”

“No, Ellie, he didn’t marry her—white men don’t marry black women out here, dear. Aren’t you growing out of your English swaddling bands a little? Can’t you understand? It’s hard on the children, of course—Lily’s ashamed of her mother, and her father was ashamed of her! I took her when she was fifteen—she’d no home (her father had an English wife, who came out to join him) and it’s not good for a girl with that sort of back history to knock about. It runs in the breed, you see. So I made her housekeeper here!” The short sentences came between the puffs of cigar smoke. Ellice was absolutely silent, as if faced with an unnerving horror that was only drawing on her.

“It’s the same with Jersey King,” went on Pryce simply. “Only he’s nearer White than Mulatto—his mother was an Octoroon, and his father—well, he’d a sort of claim on me, being a son of my own cousin, Lionel Rignold over at Port Maria. Jersey is what is called a Mustufino, if you want the exact term. You’d hardly know he’d got the taint, eh? That’s the worst of colour—you never stamp it out. It will lie low for a generation, so that you get a boy with fair hair and blue eyes like Jersey, who looks English, and his son maybe will be a little nigger! You’ll learn to know the signs some day—

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a setting of the eyes, a kink in the hair, something in the skin. It always means colour. And colour means—the other thing.”

“Uncle!” She pushed his arm from her at last, and sat up, quivering with outrage. “Do you mean that they are both—illegitimate?”

Mr. Pryce knocked the ash deliberately from his cigar, regarding the white face at his side which stared at him from the dusk of the verandah as if he could not quite grasp her obvious dismay. The extreme narrowness of her experience, and the rigid rules of her education, were beyond his scope. He looked as if he could not deal with such a mental attitude for lack of precedent.

“White men don’t marry black women much, out here,” was all he found to say at last. “Didn’t you know that, Ellie? How did you account for the Mulatto and the Sambo and the Quadroon? Must have been some white blood slipped in somewhere, you know!”

“I supposed they must have married—the lower class Whites!”

He shook his head.

“Even the lowest class White won’t marry a black woman—unless he’s drunk!” he said drily. “And it’s mostly the upper class white man who is responsible for the Mulatto in the first instance. You can’t blame the men, either. It’s climate and custom,—and—and heaps of other things. I can’t explain it to you, honey. Look at my boys round there—what are they to do after work’s over? They’re young and strong, and—well, I won’t have any fooling with Lily Scott, and besides *she* can take care of herself. But they mostly keep a black woman to themselves, and pay for her, too. I don’t discuss these things with them, but they know that I know, and I shut my eyes to it as long as they do it decently and don’t ill-use the

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women. If you learn Penn-keeping you'll have to swallow the question of Black and White."

But he talked to the quiet night and an empty chair. With her hands over her ears Ellice had flown, and was crouching beside her bed with a feeling of insane terror—a physical sensation as if the whole earth were being torn up beneath her feet. What a lawless world was this into which her feet had strayed! It seemed as if a hideous pit yawned before her, full of unspeakable crimes suddenly bared to the indecent light of day. For in her guarded, sheltered life she had vaguely surmised as to those unfortunates known as "fallen," and had looked upon it as a thing so much worse than murder that it might not be mentioned in fair and open speech. That such things existed even her narrow world could not prevent her knowing, though they existed entirely outside of it; but of the exact meaning of the word which designated an unknown quantity she never asked herself until marriage rudely revealed the relations of the sexes to her. The crime did not lose by being robbed of its mystery; she saw it anew by the light of her own disgust and dismay as a thing still more unspeakable, and thrust it into the background of her mind, labelled unfit for a woman with any modesty to consider.

Now, in a moment, there it was in front of her, forced upon her comprehension and contemplation together. It was all round her—in the careless faces of the white men, the complacent indifference of the black people, the undeniable witness of two lives under the same roof with her. The stain of colour! She dimly realized already what it implied, and why she had shrunk from the two victims whom she pitied none the less for not liking them more. Poor things! poor things! It seemed to Ellice, in whose creed the wedding ring was a necessary key to any matrimonial heaven, that their position must be intolerable to them, and their despair a thing that never slept

night or day. She would have felt it so bitterly herself that she searched her mind for trace of such feeling in the two she knew, and strove in vain to remember it in Lily Scott's lazy enjoyment of existence, or the self-satisfaction that irked her in King. Did they not care? It would have been a stigma to her, and she writhed under the very thought, with a restless lift of her fair head from the cool white sheets of the bed where she had buried it.

Then her thoughts reverted to Uncle Dick with a new resentment. Why had he told her this ugly thing, and opened her eyes to the undercurrent of the new world around her—that insatiable world of Nature where the sap always rises. For the first time this phenomenon recurred to her mind with a hint of menace. She hated the suggestion of sex in the breeding Earth. She wished that Uncle Dick had left her in ignorance. “He thinks nothing of it himself—he is a man!” she said resentfully. “And he has grown hardened to it.—No, not hardened, because he was sorry for them. He took them both in at Mafoota, and tried to make life easier than it might have been elsewhere!” Her eyes softened. Even the second-hand, inferior piano (it was a cheap instrument, as she had gauged) became a material virtue as conceived by Uncle Dick. She saw the practical side of the man, the kindness that did not shrink from knowledge, but pitied and tried to ameliorate a bad way of the world. She herself would fain have turned her back on the ugly thing, and would have removed it as far as possible from herself, rather than take it into her home.—

Gradually her eyes filled with tears; she laid her head down against the cool linen of the bed, and knelt there sobbing. But the tears were not for her new enlightenment—not for the hurt resentment—they were for the humanity she had not found in herself, but in careless, hardened Dick Pryce, so used to slips of human nature that he could be charitable. . . .

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Nine months ago Ellice had slipped half fainting in this very room, crying her heart out at this same man's feet. She was on her knees again to him in fancy, crying as bitterly for her own hardness of heart as she had then cried for self-pity and the wrongs she had fancied against herself. Something surely had ripened in her, even within a year, for she would not now have given up that bitter experience in the past, or even the shock and change of the new world she was learning to understand, since it had brought her to Mafoota and a larger outlook upon the world.

The Second Year

CHAPTER VII

"In the greenest growth of the Maytime,
I rode where the woods were wet,
Between the dawn and the daytime
The Spring was glad that we met.

"I saw where the sun's hand pointed,
I knew what the birds' note said;
By the dawn and the dewfall anointed,
You were queen by the gold on your head!"
A. C. SWINBURNE.

WHERE Tom Tidler's Ground leads into Almanack the guinea grass grew thick and rich and brushed against the pony's knees. The land here described a semicircle, and ran along the foot of the encircling hills, so that the grazing enclosures were narrow and reached out towards the boundary of Mafoota—that disputed point where Endeavour Penn abutted on to the last common. Tom Tidler's Ground was deep in the valley, and cleaned of trees and scrub, and from the hillside above was microscopically clear to a horseman descending to the levels. But the tree patches and the uneven ground rendered such a rider much more indistinguishable from Tom Tidler's Ground, a fact which occurred to Ronald Arbuthnott as he drew rein in the cover of the last cotton-tree and sat still in his saddle to look at something below him.

Across the flat green surface of Tom Tiddler's Ground, towards his cover, a second figure on horseback was riding

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slowly through the long guinea grass. At a distance of barely twenty yards it paused, the pony stretching his neck to the pasture, and the rider sitting still in the sunshine as if for Arbuthnott to observe. At first sight he might have mistaken it for Arnold Whitworth, for the boyish figure was dressed in a loose flannel shirt, riding breeches, and long boots such as the bookkeepers at Mafoota wore; but under the shapeless straw hat fell a long bright gleam—a woman's hair, gold in the golden sunshine. Arbuthnott drew his breath hard, and instinctively raised the field glasses slung over his shoulder, and which assisted even his keen sight after straying cattle.

"Miss Honouram!" he said under his breath.

What was she doing? Without the least intention of playing the spy he levelled the glasses upon her, for the motionless attitude suggested to him that she might be in some difficulty, the pony's girths wrong, perhaps, or a stone in his shoe. On the other hand, the disuse of the wilds made him hesitate to intrude upon a lady if she were merely indulging in maiden meditation. So he sat still under the cotton-tree—as quiet a figure as was Ellice in her unconscious betrayal before his eyes.

The pony cropped here and there with delicious ease, the reins loose on his neck, but still held in one hand; with the other the girl loosened the flannel shirt at her neck and pushed it back as if to free her throat. This was what Arbuthnott thought in fact that she was doing, until he saw her draw a long dark cord from under the shirt and look at some object suspended on it. Twenty yards—even thirty—through a good field glass is no obstacle to long sight. Arbuthnott caught a gleam on the gold ring—and guessed its significance. His grip on his own rein tightened so convulsively that he almost betrayed his whereabouts by making his pony start and move forward. He checked the beast with another fierce movement, and waited to see the girl below him kiss the ring. He was

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sure she would do this—but she did not; she sat still for some sixty seconds, the ring lying in her hand and her eyes bent upon it. Then she dropped it into her breast again, drew some secret fold of woman's garments above it, and rebuttoned the boyish shirt at her throat. He remembered then the movement of her hand to her breast the first time that he had sat opposite to her at the Mafoota tea table, and understood it. This was the secret talisman she wore there. He remained watching her, mentally as well as physically, but before he expected it she had turned her pony's unwilling head towards the further pasture called Almanack, and was riding away from him, still secure in her ignorance of his neighbourhood.

He knew the country like an open map. No sooner was Ellice safely out of sight and sound than his own pony was flying helter skelter down the rough track of the hills at a pace which would have landed most men and horses amongst the great grey stone upbreaking through the coarse grass and scrub. But with his knees in and his hands down he held the beast together and stumbled into a bye-path skirting Tom Tidler's Ground on the further side from Almanack, then for a short, hard half-mile on the open road, then with a plunge into Venables and Cross Roads, pastures on the left of the road again, to emerge ahead of his quarry on the Endeavour side. He had successfully headed her off without her knowing him behind her, and he turned his wet pony to meet her, walking leisurely along the way he had come, but now again in the open road where she must emerge in another minute, if, as he guessed, she was coming through Banana Patch and Rose-apple. His hand was lifting the soft felt from his head and his voice calling a cheery and innocent "Good morning!" almost before the startled blood had risen to her face at sight of him.

"You are out early, Miss Honouram! I thought I was the only human being astir so far on our side as this!"

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"I fancy Mr. King is in Dispute or Eden—the cattle were driven out there yesterday," she stammered, with a stealthy glance down at her boyish knee gripping the saddle.

"I have not come through Dispute," he remarked, not adding, however, that he had seen the cattle there and calculated on it for turning her back through the pastures she had chosen.

"Your horse looks as if you had been overriding!"

"He is in bad condition, and I galloped him over Boundary Common," said Arbuthnott, with careless mendacity. "I see you are qualified for busha!"

She laughed a little impatiently. "I can't ride scrub in skirts! It is impossible to get off and open the gates. Uncle Dick always told me I should come to this. But it is only since last month."

"Forgive me! I was not so impertinent as to criticise your common sense in riding dress. I was referring to your early hours, and far supervision."

"O-oh!" She drew a little breath as if annoyed that she had unnecessarily betrayed herself, and swung the wild yellow mane back from her shoulders. It fell below her waist, he noted furtively, and was tied in a businesslike fashion with a black ribbon. Without obvious attention he was able to observe also that her pretty boyishness had not lost her the nice attention to detail that had made her unusual in this part of the country. She had fashioned the grey flannel shirt for herself, and it did not bag on the expanding figure, though it hung as loosely as any youth's. The riding breeches were new, and of an undemonstrative dark brown. Only the long boots shewed signs of service and were a thought clumsy. He had seen them before, when she set her foot in Mr. Pryce's hand at the door of Endeavour, and sprang for the saddle. Out of sight, in the dark of the passage, he remembered the irresistible im-

pulse that had made him lurk and watch. Was there a point of her that he had missed?

"We are buying cattle of Knockalva this week," said Ellice thoughtfully, her large soft eyes wandering past him to the distant view of Five Corners which they were approaching through Seville. For they had turned off the road as by common consent, and were keeping to the pastures below it. "We have no good Herefords."

"You are buying for butcher meat?"

"No—for breeding."

There was another pause, while the ponies jogged side by side and the sunshine touched the edges of her hair to burning gold. They passed a native hut on their left and Arbuthnott dismounted to open a gate for her. These seemed glorified incidents of the road, all the more a bitter pleasure because of his knowledge of what she carried hidden in her breast. He looked up in her soft womanly face, that seemed no less feminine for her mock manliness, and wondered savagely if the gentleness there were due to the influence of the ring—for that unknown man who seemed to ride with them, a shadowy third.

"What do you do for draught?" said Ellice, her dreamy gaze leaving the Five Corners pasture and coming back to the big ugly man at her side.

"What? Eh? Draught?" he said blankly.

"Draught! You can't only use mules—our oxen are not very good."

"Oh! I see. We have the half-bred Indian cattle."

"I have heard of them!" she said eagerly. "But Uncle Dick has some prejudice against them."

(He wondered, stupidly, if ever man had talked with woman like this before, riding through the green heart of the land where all live things pulsed "Love! Love!" Through the hollow

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stalks of the juicy grass, and the flowerful trees, and the indomitable wild vines and scrub, the sap was rising—rising—forever and ever. He felt it in the sweet rigourous atmosphere, and in the thrill of the green life that brushed him in passing—while he talked of cattle breeding and the Penn against his racing blood!)

“I don’t think Mr. Pryce can have tried the Mysore,” he said, bluntly as she thought, in her innocence of the curb through which he spoke. “We have three teams.”

“Where do you buy?”

“Shettlewood.”

“I wish Uncle Dick would give them a trial,” said Ellice earnestly. “When Mr. King goes to Knockalva he could take Shettlewood on his way.”

“Yes,” he said, wondering how much longer his endurance would hold out through the catechism.

“It would be almost worth while to breed for ourselves if they are so satisfactory.”

“No—you can’t. They won’t sell the Shettlewood bulls. The owner imports his own thoroughbreds. You will have to buy the draught stock as you want it.” (Damn Shettlewood, and all Indian cattle!)

“I am taking you out of your way!” said Ellice with gentle abruptness, as they threaded back through Five Corners and paused with their faces towards Mafoota House at the further gate.

“I will ride half a mile further with you—if I may?” he said, choking back an insane desire to tell her that her hair had caught fire from the sun, and was burning his heart away. What would she say, this sweet, prosaic, little Penn-keeper, so absorbed in her flocks and herds?

“Yes, you may come,” said Ellice, with a little added dignity. They swung through another gate, and up a steep

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bit of common leading to the piece called No Man's Land before she spoke again. Arbuthnott was savagely cursing his luck that he could think of nothing to tell her about pasturing Herefords. Years of experience in the country set against her fifteen months of Penn-keeping made him no more glib with his tongue to gain her gravely attentive face for a few minutes.

"Your cubs are better than ours this year," he began. "That jackass Mr. Pryce had from the States—"

"Is it very lonely at Endeavour?" said Ellice with a sudden gentleness that struck him dumb. A man whose prayer is answered after he has despaired of it is apt to be taken at a disadvantage for availing himself of its fulfilment.

"Very," he said briefly.

"We are your nearest neighbours at Mafoota?"

"Yes."

"The nearest white women, at any rate." (She shook herself mentally free from the association with Lily Scott—but she could not thrust poor Lily outside the pale in open speech.)

"The nearest—and indeed the only ladies I ever see," he said, tersely.

"You don't come to Mafoota very often, Mr. Arbuthnott."

"I come as often as I dare," he said, recklessly.

"Come oftener," she advised, with unaltered lack of self-consciousness. "I want to learn all I can from you—I know it is a joke of Mr. Pryce's to call me the Busha of Mafoota, but indeed I should like to know all that a girl can about Penn-keeping."

"You are very wrapped up in Mafoota, Miss Honouram?"

The blood in her face deepened the sunburn. "I love it!" she said, and her voice faltered a little. "I can't tell you why—"

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perhaps I will some day. What was that place you told me you were in before you came up here?"

"The Country which is called *Look Behind!*"

"Well, I also was in a country which I call Look Behind—and then I found Mafoota, and I learned to look forward again! Is there really a place of that name?" she asked a little curiously.

"Yes, a district. It is out beyond the Crown Lands, but not so far as Accompong, which is a Maroon town."

"What were you doing there?"

"Trying to grow ginger, and learning to starve on yams. Unfortunately the European does not flourish on native food like the Negro!" said Arbuthnott, grimly.

"Beyond the Crown Lands!" said Ellice blankly. "But there are only black people there!"

"There was a white person there, however, for the space of two years."

Her eyes began to pity him. "Did you never come into the better known districts? Never speak to white men?"

"Oh, I had a certain amount of society, and even of luxuries. Sometimes I rode down, about six miles, into Troy."

"Is that a native settlement?"

"Troy is a village. There is a post-office there, a store where one may buy new rum, several huts, and a barrack of a church. The church is useful for black christenings and white funerals!"

She shivered a little, with a half curious stare, like a child's, into his hard face. "And that was your nearest link with civilization?" she said rather breathlessly.

"Civilization lies far beyond that—eight miles through bush and cockpit, over a good road, however, into Balaclava which is on the railway. You passed Balaclava on your way up, when you came from Kingston. There was no white man even there when I was in Look Behind, but it's a respectably

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big place. On market day the whole country-side flocks down and jabbars there in the dust and the sunshine. I went once—every house seems to be much smaller than its oven, I remember. They are huge stone things separate from the huts, for it's a great bread-making place." He spoke in pausing sentences, as if in his memory the little crowded town—Balaclava is a town compared to Troy—were vividly before his weary eyes again. The name conjured up a memory in Ellice's mind also—she remembered her journey from Kingston, and there was a shadow of a frown between her brows as she answered.

"I know the place you mean—it seemed to me a mere station to break the stretches of country on the line."

"Nevertheless it is a point of importance to those who take up ground in the Crown Lands," he remarked quietly, his eyes coming back to her face from their gaze into the lovely distance. "To my fancy the sense of law and order stops at that part of the road beyond which a buggy cannot go. Troy Bridge always seems to me the last link with civilization."

"And beyond?"

"Beyond one can go on horseback, through the Crown Lands, until one gets to Look Behind."

"What do the Crown Lands look like?"

He laughed a little. Her interest was like a healing hand upon the sore of his remembered loneliness. "Very much as if you had burnt out the raw bush in order to plant banana and yam and ginger and sugar-cane all in one grand jumble together. The samples of each cultivation are so small that it looks rather like crazy patchwork. Look Behind is only an enlarged version of the same thing."

"I wonder why they call it that?" said Ellice musingly.

"Perhaps because the men who drift there are seeking a last resource, and have left their best behind them!" he said

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with cynical lightness. "Our roads part here, Miss Honouram. May I really come to Mafoota House and tell you what I know of Penn-keeping—sometimes?"

"Whenever you can," she said simply. "I shall be glad of some one to talk to—you see Uncle Dick is so busy!" And she turned her pony's head into Aquaduct, and rode on to the Home Pastures.

The unconscious betrayal of her last words made Arbuthnott smile on his homeward way. It was not young King then who had been their shadowy third—the gold ring hanging from the cord round her neck drew a wider circle than the household at Mafoota. He forgot the green world round him in engrossing speculation, and hardly knew what road he took until his pony roused him by coming to a standstill as if by custom. Then the rider glanced round and found that he had passed the road to Endeavour, and actually ridden along a familiar track leading into the bush without consciousness on his own part until the animal startled him by stopping. He was close to one of the small holdings into which Mr. Platt had cut the land, in a valley between the hills—a place known as New Orleans and little exploited by the white men of the neighbourhood. He himself, however, knew it but too well. To his right was a cultivated patch of banana deep in the valley, but the path he had followed led straight to a small hut, its two rooms crazily thatched, and the whole structure half hidden by a group of cocoanuts. In the open doorway stood a tall Negress, who stepped leisurely from the raised floor to the warm earth at sight of the motionless pony, and came towards Arbuthnott with her hands on her hips, and the perfect balance that only her race can acquire. To see her walk, indeed, was an education in freedom of limbs and bare feet—woman moving as God meant her to move.

"'Marnin', Marse Arbuthnott!" she said with a broad

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smile that split the shining black of her face in two. "I beg yo' come in?"

"No, Mattie!" said the busha with scant ceremony, driving his heels into his pony and swinging him round to return the way he had come. "Go *on*, you brute!"

He broke into a canter, putting an ever-widening stretch of track between him and the buxom black woman. Yet as he rode on to a late breakfast and the galling reprimand that awaited him from the employer he despised, he could no longer keep in his mind the strange fair vision of a boy rider with long gold hair—he saw instead the huge coarse woman whose thick lips had bade him enter, and the little thatched hut among the cocoanuts.

CHAPTER VIII

“Hair such a mixture of flax and floss,
Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too!
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold’s mere dross—
Here Life smiled, ‘Think what I meant to do!’
And Love sighed, ‘Fancy my loss!’

ROBERT BROWNING.

THERE was no flower garden at Mafoota when Ellice had come there fifteen months since, and but a rough attempt at cultivation. Those who imagine that Jamaica is a naturally blossoming wilderness are deeply ignorant of the difficulties in the way of the horticulturist. For all its rich fertility—perhaps because of it—the soil is not tractable; and the gardener, planning ordered loveliness, finds that his very success is his disaster. The flowers run out of bonds if he but turn his back, and his cherished seeds outwit him and have grown into tiresome luxuriance before he can train them to bed, or standard, or trellis. Furthermore, flowers do not flourish so naturally as weeds, and it is trees that blossom rather than plants. Everything is on such a vast scale that to reduce it to garden proportions is more difficult than appears possible to the hopeful florist, and he has always to bear in mind that the lack of water in the dry season is the root of all evil, while during the rains his flowers are doomed until next year—if not washed out of the ground.

No one at the Penn seemed to have exerted himself to beautify the approach to the house, and a languid attempt at decoration was only represented by a straggling line of hibiscus

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beneath the east verandah. Even the grass was not cut to the semblance of a lawn, though it grew close up to the house, until Ellice asked and obtained the labours of one of the black boys, and after some trouble got a mowing-machine sent up from Kingston. It took a fortnight to induce George Saunders to remember to call for it at Montpelier, and bring it home in the buggy, though Ellice had, with some trepidation, already paid for it from her own too ample purse, and glossed over the outlay as best she might to Mr. Pryce. She itched to employ some of that draft from England, lying idle at the bank, to beautify the old place, but the difficulty of explaining her possession of the money hindered her as much as the drawing of it. She had, however, brought out plenty for immediate use or a chance dilemma in notes, and made secret plans for its expenditure if only Uncle Dick could be hoodwinked.

The grass cutting was a success, partly because Robert, the black boy, preferred pushing the novel machine up and down the slope before the house to the stable work on which he had hitherto been employed—partly also because water was fairly obtainable from the stream at the foot of the hill. In her mind Ellice saw a vision of properly laid pipes that should bring the water up to the house, and a new pathway beneath the verandah. Those Utopian dreams, however, were in abeyance; in the present she could only rejoice in the clean sweep of emerald, and the gardenia bushes which Robert planted and tended under her direction. Jersey King had promised a trellis for stephanotis, and a rustic archway for honeysuckle; but creepers nearer the house and over the verandah were denied her on account of the mosquitos which they bring.

Though there were no creepers, however, or vegetation encouraged for some distance from the habitation itself, the sweep of the newly cut grass was broken by a solitary tree—the one tree that Ellice had vaguely noticed on her arrival. It stood

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some twenty yards from the verandah, towards the stables, and was a stranger to Ellice, for it was an Otaheite apple. Its shape was rather that of a young oak, save that the branches were not wide-spread. But the foliage was as thick as a chestnut's and the broad leaves a singularly brilliant, burnished green. When she had arrived it had been merely a mass of emerald, but a few months later in the year it had bloomed in a wonderful fashion. Under its fans of green leaves appeared tassels on tassels of silk, the most brilliant shade of cochineal, and when the pink shreds began to fall the ground at the foot of the tree was carpeted as thickly as if the fairies had laid down cloth of ceremony for a coronation. Ellice had admired it even in her torpid months before the view awoke a response in her, but in her second year a new sense of colour made it a passionate delight.

She went out one warm afternoon in April, at an hour when all the tropical world is still adoze, and stood under the Otaheite apple as Eve may have stood under another apple-tree in Eden. The boys were all away at their work, for the early midday meal was furnished hours since. Even Uncle Dick was out, over at Hopetown on the other side the hills, and Lily Scott was asleep in her untidy room upstairs. Ellice had been snatching a furtive opportunity to wash her hair, and had come out into the sun-warmed day to dry it. She crossed the verandah with cautious steps, and sauntering over the empty lawn pushed her way in under the lower branches of the apple-tree, and leaned against the trunk, looking up and up into the close roof of glowing green with the wonderful splashes of pinky red. The flowers grew so close beneath the leaves that from a distance they only showed where some gorgeous patch was too brilliant to hide. But beneath the branches one had the full beauty and glory of the flowering. Above Ellice's head came the happy drowsy murmur of innumerable bees, as they

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sucked the honey through the tree's brief blossoming time. It made the perfect pleasure of the day seem audible.

How warm and still it was! The golden mantle of the girl's hair fell over her shoulders and below her waist, where the last bright waves flung a further shadow on the white gown. Rosy tassels of the tree dropped in a silent shower upon her as the wind moved it, and made her a fantastic crown. Beyond the tree the faintest sense of life was just beginning to awake in the grass, in the plantations further off, in the very air. It was past four o'clock, and the sleeping tropical Earth felt the awakening in her which evening brings. No insect hum was distinguishable as yet, save the bees in the apple-tree, but the sense of sound was already breaking the utter hush of noon.

Ellice leaned her ripening breast against the tree-trunk, and felt the warmth of it through the thin muslin of her gown. The sun had beaten on the leaves all day, and his warmth had filtered through to warm even the rough bark. With the thrill of a Dryad she put her arms around the tree-trunk, as if it were warm with its own life, and pressed her yielding body against it. The blood quickening through her own heart seemed to her the pulse of the tree's never-resting vitality. The sap was rising—rising! Spring was here in the World all the year round. She pressed warm lips to the warm bark with a senseless impulse, and her limbs felt strange and lax as if touched by an unknown power.

In the joy of mere living she began unconsciously to sing, even as birds do, and her voice took up the broken strain that had haunted her from Eleanor's repertoire:

“Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love!”—

She forgot that she was betraying her hiding-place, and undoing her own caution. She forgot all the pinpricks of everyday life, and the necessary restrictions that seemed trivial in

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the elementary bliss of the moment. The first she knew of the neighbourhood of another human being besides herself was a brown hand pushing aside the boughs of the covert, and a man's surprised face looking in on her.

"Why, it's Miss Honouram! I couldn't think what imprisoned nightingale had got into the Otaheite!"

"Oh, Mr. King!" exclaimed Ellice in open annoyance. "Are you back already? I did not think it was anywhere near tea time."

"It's past four o'clock," he said briefly, but the brevity was not on account of her frank rebuff. He was looking, with something she had been vaguely fearing to see in his eyes, at her white figure and fair face, his stare as mannerless as primeval man's. For a moment Ellice could find no reason for its intensity; then she remembered her hair—that golden snare for a young man's fancy, loose upon her shoulders, and put her hands up to roll it into some sort of conventional knot.

"Don't, please!" said Jersey King.

In the shadow of the trees where their two faces were revealed to each other, his eyes were startlingly blue, but her gaze sought for something in his face to legitimise the intangible repugnance in her. It was not all Uncle Dick's revelation of the taint in him—she saw, with keener eyes than last year's even, a hint in his too crisply curling hair, a shade in his skin—that made her draw back, though ever so gently.

"I have been washing my hair, and came out to dry it. I must put it up before tea," she said succinctly.

"Why are you forever running away if I speak to you?" he protested, his face colouring more hotly than the sun had burnt it. "I have tried over and over again for a little talk, and you always invent an excuse and leave me."

Her own skin went white instead of pink, her chin a trifle

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higher, her northern eyes as cold as their native frosts. She looked as if she found him presumptuous, but her voice was perfectly, serenely civil.

"I am sorry to have nipped your social aspirations in the bud," she said. "But I was really not even conscious of any effort on your part to talk to me."

The white lie was effectual, but not in the way that she expected. Had she delivered her snub to an Englishman she might have checked him as she desired. It had the effect of a spur to Jersey King.

"You can find plenty of time for Arbuthnott when he is over here five times a week!" he flashed. "You know when *he* tries to talk to you—and encourage it!"

The sense of physical uncleanness with which the taint in him filled her was extended to her mentally. Her face took the mask with which a white woman quells the impertinence of an inferior, and without a word she brushed aside the boughs behind her and drew away from the tree and from him together. He hesitated for an instant, his young blue eyes staring after the white gown and the golden cloak of hair, but some instinct of self-preservation prevented his following her. He swung off to the house instead, and as he passed through the verandah came face to face with Lily Scott, her red mouth yawning still with sleep, her large eyes blank of all expression save animal languor.

"Oh! You're back early—what's that for?" she said with a shade of suspicion in her waking tone.

"What's that to you? Get out of the way, can't you—d'you want to block the doorway?" he said rudely, a savage flush darkening his skin. The desire to hit back at something weaker than himself, in return for the rebuff received from another stronger than he, made him grip her savagely by the arm. She did not cry out, but her eyes flickered oddly as if with

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flame, and her thick lips protruded rather than tightened as a European's might have done.

"You're drunk, Jersey!" she said in a lower tone.

"No, I'm not. But I'm best not interfered with at present."

"Have I done anything to make you angry?" she pleaded suddenly, her voice softening and her face melting to alluring beauty again.

"No—don't be a little fool!"

"Then who has?"

"Ellie Honouram!" he said, making the name an insolence even in his ungoverned fury. "I told her the truth—Platt's Busha is forever hanging round her, and she treats him as if he were the superior of every one here except the old man. I could tell some tales that would dress him down pretty quick—he's no saint—"

He slung past her, muttering, the very sound of his voice coarsened. Lily stood for a moment where he had left her, her hands clenched on the flimsy cotton of the gown she wore. It was the red-coloured muslin that Ellice had found so barbarously suited to the girl's beauty, and her whole face and neck seemed to have caught fire from it. The blood beat in her lips and her temples, and her eyes glanced round her murderously. She put her hands to the string of pearls at her throat and broke it savagely so that the beads rolled about the bare floor of the inner hall; then with a cry like some animal in throes of pain she flung herself at the stairs, and rushing up to her own room locked the door upon her helpless passion.

When she left Jersey King Ellice did not immediately return to the house. She was quite as angry as he, but with a still, curbed anger that he could not understand. Instead of turning by the outhouses, and making her way round to the back doorways whereby she could have got in, she held straight on, past the stables, into one of two small closures called the Home

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Pastures, where the riding horses were generally turned loose, and the cows whose milk was reserved for the household. The pastures were empty now, the animals being in use, and Ellice made her way aimlessly through the first gate, and towards a huge mango-tree in the far corner of the enclosure. There was no fruit ripe, but under the green branches were three slabs of granite partly overgrown by creepers and other wild spoil of Nature. Ellice knew what they were, for Dick Pryce had shown them to her as curiosities. Years since, in those old slaving days of which she had read in the account book, the cholera came to Mafoota and the black people fell in numbers. They had been buried here and there, all about the estate, and the place of their graves roughly marked; but these three granite tombs were the resting-places of whole families, one packed upon another, who had been evidently of some importance. The shock to Ellice's susceptibilities given by finding them in unconsecrated ground was, strangely enough, softened rather than otherwise by learning that in old days it was not only black people who were so roughly entombed. One of the graves, Dick Pryce had told her, was that of a white man who had been killed in a duel. All trace of who he was, or the cause of quarrel, was lost, but the tradition had remained at Mafoota that he had fought Heaven of Ramble on the boundary between Montpelier and Mafoota, and had been brought here and buried without an ostentation that might have entailed an inquiry by law. Ellice had felt a strange thrill of pity and curiosity over the story, and she had wondered over the nameless man beneath the heavy stone which was all his record for nearly a hundred years. Would that former Heaven of Ramble have to render an account at the Judgment Day, and plead the cause which had led to this man's death, in his own defence? She sat down on the duellist's headstone, which had fallen forward during the passing of years, and mused, forgetting that

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it was tea time, forgetting even Jersey King and his accusations, in the quiet spot. Beyond the annoyance of the boy's audacity she had no prick of conscience to trouble her. Arbuthnott came to Mafoota frequently, as she had asked him to do, but no word had ever passed between them that the world at large might not have said, and for all the foregone tie Ellice held herself as a married woman, and did not dream of other men in her life to matter besides the husband she had disowned. The traditions of her upbringing were still cords to bind her to a rigid path of duty, as far as she herself was concerned; and though she would acknowledge no right owing to her husband, she none the less regarded herself as bound by her hidden wedding ring. That other men could overstep the barrier she had morally set up did not come within her power of conception as yet. When Jersey King attempted to so much as to express his personal attraction to her she was the more annoyed, and took the attitude of an outraged queen. But his introduction of Arbuthnott's name did not make the matter worse, for had she put the question to herself she would have been satisfied to answer that he at least had made no such mistake as the bookkeeper's—their talk was almost always of Penn-keeping. Had she known his power of self-restraint it might have been a humiliating lesson, but a salutary one. As it was, she regarded him as an educated man—though he told her of none of his experiences before the time spent in the country called Look Behind—and of a different class to any of the men at Mafoota, and she frankly acknowledged that she liked his society; but she saw no reason for foregoing it for Jersey King's petty outburst. Her thoughts had indeed strayed to Arbuthnott on this particular occasion, with a certain defiance of opinion in granting him her favour, and she was still speculating idly on his character when she looked across the field and saw him.

He had just opened the gate on the far side of the pasture

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from where she was sitting—a lonely white figure perched on a nameless grave—and was evidently coming towards her. From the riding boots and the whip in his hand she judged that he had just dismounted, having ridden over from Endeavour for tea, and for the first time observed him with some critical consciousness during the time he took to cross the grass to her. At first he was nothing but the square figure of a man in rather worn riding dress, but as he grew bigger and bigger she distinguished the strength of his frame and the dark ugly face under the soft felt hat. Certainly there was nothing obviously attractive in Ronald Arbuthnott. His face was a trifle secretive, and possibly brutal. Ellice liked his eyes, which were dark and friendly, but she had never analyzed the lines of the mouth beneath the dark moustache, or the square, cleft chin. Her first impulse on seeing him had been to roll up her unlucky hair, and by the time he reached her it was twisted into an insecure knot at the nape of her neck. But if he had noted the movement he made no comment on it.

“How are you?” he said, offering her a large, hard hand. “Have you had your tea, and repented already?”

“No, indeed—I did not realize that it was tea time!” she said confusedly, wondering how long the hasty toilet would hold, and whether her hair would come down at her first movement and drown her in gold.

“I thought perhaps you had eaten plantain pies ‘not wisely but too well,’ and had come out here to muse on the mortality of all earthly pleasures! It seems an appropriate spot!”

“Oh!” she said vaguely, with a polite smile for his mild joke, which she hardly heeded. “Does Uncle Dick think I am lost?”

“Well, he seemed relieved when I offered to go and excavate amongst his tombs. The fact is I saw you perched up there as I rode up, and wondered if you were that greatest

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horror of the Blacks, 'a white woman duppy'! Has it occurred to you that you will be eaten alive by ticks?"

She shook her head. "They do not trouble me much, really. But I must go in," she said, and jumped down from her seat, for the slanting slab of granite where she sat was a foot or so from the ground and might have been an imposing monument had it not fallen out of the horizontal and gained a crazy appearance. His movement to help her was too late, but her own activity had done what she feared, and as she began to cross the pasture with him she felt the coil of her hair slipping over her shoulders again. She wondered whether it would be best to stand still and twist it tighter, while she honestly explained the position, or to ignore it? Surely this was too old a man to be set aflame by a glimpse of golden hair! She was not following her companion's remarks, and in consequence was caught napping.

"Do you know, Miss Honouram, I think there must be a strain of Scotch blood in you!" said Arbuthnott mildly, at last.

Then she was startled into attention. "Why?" she asked, guiltily.

"Because your sense of humour is so deliberate. When I tell you my best jokes—jokes that have amused kings!—I can hardly get a smile out of you!"

She laughed then, half-vexedly, at herself. "If you must know, I did not hear a word you were saying! I am so afraid that my hair is coming down."

"It isn't coming," said Arbuthnott amicably, with a glance at her shoulders, "it *is* down!"

At which Ellice was, very naturally, incensed. "I can't help it if it is—and you needn't be so positive!" she said quickening her pace, and walking with as much dignity as might be towards the gate. Arbuthnott stretched his long legs a little, and his stride over equalled hers.

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"Might I suggest that if you give up wearing a hat you will get sun-stroke?" he said gravely, but she suspected a laugh in his eyes and would not yield her freezing demeanour.

"Oh, no, I shall not—I shall only get my head dry!" she retorted carelessly.

"You have been washing your hair, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And came out to dry it?"

"Yes."

"And are annoyed at being caught?"

"It has been a series of catches, you see!" said Ellice, maliciously. "Mr. King was before you in discovering me!"

"The devil!" muttered Arbuthnott, catching his big moustache between his teeth. All the enjoyment of her discomfort had gone out of his eyes, for he had his own to think about.

"I am sorry he annoyed you, Miss Honouram—"

"I did not say so."

"Oh, of course he admired it! That type of boy—"

"He did not say so!"

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed impatiently. "As if I did not know that any other man, as well as myself—"

"You did not say so!"

"Miss Honouram," he said suddenly, turning grave as she began to laugh— "Since when have you become a coquette?"

She looked up with a flash of reproach in her blue-grey eyes, and her face was rosy under the shadow of her delicious hair. "I am sorry!" she said with childish penitence. "But it was you who seemed inclined to joke! Do not apply ugly names to me—indeed I do not deserve them!"

His scrutiny of her did not waver for an instant. "Not with regard to King?" he demanded.

"No, indeed!"

"You are sure?"

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"You can ask him!" she flashed, with a memory of the younger man's angry, baffled face as she left him. But he appeared satisfied, and cross-questioned her no more. Nor did it occur to her that he had had no right to arraign her before the tribunal of his own jealousy, though being a woman she knew that he was jealous, and accepted it as homage. She was not a coquette as he had suggested, but she would not have been human had not the two male personalities near her given her an innocent pleasure by their approval. Towards King she felt a rather disdainful pity—towards Arbuthnott frank friendship—no more. It was their attitude as Man in the abstract which gratified her vanity rather than their individual attraction.

Mr. Pryce was still eating his home-made bread and butter—light risen bread, thanks to Ellice—and watercresses freshly gathered from the stream, when Arbuthnott and his companion entered. George Saunders and young Whitworth had been and gone, as their becrumbed plates testified, but neither Lily Scott nor King had put in an appearance.

"Jersey isn't coming," said the Penn-keeper composedly as they appeared. "Says he wants to get through the day-book quickly and be off to Montpelier. Sit down, Arbuthnott—that bread's worth eating. We ought to know, eh, Ellie?"

"Mary—the cook—made it, rather than I, Uncle. I thought her skin was less likely to show fireburn! If you will excuse me a moment, I want to put my hair tidy."

She ran away before either man could protest, and Arbuthnott slipped into the seat on Pryce's right, opposite the one she would occupy on her return. He usually sat facing Ellice by quiet persistence on his own part.

"Where is Miss Scott?" he remarked with raised brows. "Has the day-book absorbed her also?"

"I don't know," said the Penn-keeper thoughtfully. "She called down that she had a headache. I never interfere with a

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woman who has a headache, any more than with an unbroken mule!"

Arbuthnott did not pursue the subject. He cared very little whether Lily Scott appeared or no, so long as Ellice was there to satisfy his homesick sight with English roses in her face, and English corn in her hair. It was not until they rose from the table that Dick Pryce set his foot on something that crunched, and stooping, picked up a large broken pearl bead.

"Ah!" he said to himself, and the eyes under the penthouse brows did not twinkle as usual. "A broken necklace first—a headache afterwards." Then aloud: "Ellie, there's going to be a storm."

"Why, Uncle Dick!" said Ellice, prosaically. "The weather is set for another month. We shan't have the rains till May this year."

"Can't help it," said Dick Pryce with a grim smile, "I've learned to read the weather signs in this country! You mustn't judge Jamaica by England, honey, or black skins by white."

CHAPTER IX

“Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair
Is countless gold incomparable;
Fresh flower, scarce touched with signs that tell
Of love’s exuberant hotbed; nay,
Poor flower left torn since yesterday.

Poor beauty, so well worth a kiss!!”

D. G. ROSSETTI.

“SHO!” said Mary the cook. “Dar’s some dat comes roun’ hyar a-whisperin’ and a-talkin’ dat had best stay ’way for de house’s sake. Dat de third time lately dat ole man wants to see Miss Lily, an’ dar’s omens ’nuff widout he!”

“What *are* you talking about, Mary?” said Ellice, turning from the table where she was weighing out flour—carefully, for the supply was running low, and nobody was driving to Montpelier this week—to look at the stout Negress by the fire. Mary the cook was a broad white figure with a gay bandana tied over her wool, and pressed down on her shining forehead. As she stirred and skimmed the soup the beads of heat made her face as shiny as if newly glazed.

“Dar’s no grease on *dis* soup, Miss Hon’ram—it’s as clean as yo’ own hands!” she said with pride, for Ellice’s lessons had taken root so well that the good-humoured woman had begun to think that they were her own initiative, and to pride herself on her English cooking. “Pussons round hyar dey’ll eat anytink, Missus, but we knows good food from trash at M’foota!”

Two other girls, comely young women of their type, who

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were employed in the kitchen, looked up from their tasks with broad grins of congratulation. "Dat's sartinly so!" murmured one, and the other nodded. Ellice kept her puzzled eyes on Cook Mary.

"But what were you saying, Mary? Some one to see Miss Scott? Who is it? A loafer?"

The smile died out of Mary's face, and she turned back to her skimming with a glance at the open doorway leading to the outside world.

"No loafer, Miss Hon'ram—gracious honey, no! Come to beg you a loaf rather than hab one! I reckon he's from 'Deavour way or New Orleans—he ain't one ob our folks, fo' sure!"

And again the girls chorused, "No nigger on our holdings, fo' sure!"

"No! No!" said Ellice, laughing. "I meant is he a beggar—has he no work to do?"

"If he has it's to no good," said the cook oracularly. "I reckon Marse Pryce he send he about his business first time he catch him! Dar's evil in his eye, honey, fo' sure. I felt all de miseries in my insides when he look at me! He's mighty ill luck hanging roun' M'foota!"

"Nonsense!" said Ellice, practically. "I daresay Miss Scott knows something of him, and he only came to ask for work."

Mary shook her head and went on with her cooking. Ten minutes later it chanced that Ellice's part of the administration of the kitchen was done, and to cool her flushed cheeks—for the place was stifling—she stepped out of the open door for an instant to gain the fresh air. To her left lay the stable buildings, and the open green where the mules were broken, but the shortened shadow of the house still fell towards the West, and avoiding the sunshine she strolled slowly over the grass and

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round by the west wall. As she turned the corner of the house she stopped short, her feeling one of faint discomfort, if not violent enough for shock, for some yards from her stood Lily Scott in conversation with an old disreputable Negro whom she did not recognise as any of the workers on the Penn. He was dressed in a filthy shirt and old patched trousers, and his face was as hideous and repulsive as an old monkey's. It struck Ellice, too, as of a slightly different type to those of the Negroes whom she knew, the forehead more retreating, and the nose more flat. The men who belonged to Mafoota, even the full-blooded Blacks, were vacant enough in expression, but foolishly good-natured; there was nothing that could be called either kindly or humane in the villainous old man talking to Lily Scott. Even at a distance Ellice's keen young eyes decided that his cast of countenance was so bestial as to be one of sheer horror. No wonder that Cook Mary had been frightened of him, and thought he had the evil eye! No wonder also that Ellice had had a shock on seeing him with Lily Scott after the servants' infectious terror.

The couple were so deeply in conversation that they did not see Ellice, who after her moment's pause turned back quietly to the kitchen and lost them behind the corner of the house. Even as she turned, however, she saw Lily put something into the old Negro's hand, and logically concluded that he was some sort of a protégé of hers since she gave him money. Anyhow it was the housekeeper's affair and not hers. There was no secrecy that she could see in the horrible old Negro passing the open kitchen door in search of Lily, and stopping to talk to her so near the house—though it is true there were few windows opening towards the West, and the men were all out at this hour, in the further pastures. Ellice strolled along to the front verandah, pausing a moment to listen to the voices in the kitchen which had broken out the instant her supervision

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was relaxed. A small coloured child—a real “piccaninny” with a tousled black head—had crept in from the married quarters, and one of the girls was telling it a species of fairy tale, of a type that Ellice was learning to know, wherein the hero is always the spider, and is called Anancy. The native children call them ‘Nancy stories, and are amused with the wonderful adventures of the Rogue Spider as English babies are with Jack and the Beanstalk.

“An’ Anancy him say, ‘I beg you let me in! I come to marry de Queen’s daughter—I kill de bull!’ So den dey all berry pleas’, and Anancy he go in and dance at de ball wid de Queen’s daughter. But in de middle come de boy dat really kill de bull, and *he* knock at de Palace gate too, and him say, ‘I beg you let me in! I want to see de Queen!’ But de keeper him say, ‘Yo’ can’t. Dere’s a big ball becos Anancy he kill de bull and bring its head and show de Queen and marry her daughter.’ Den de boy say, ‘Go and ask de Queen to look in de mouth of de bull and see if de tongue am dere!’ And dey go and look, and de tongue am cut out. So de Queen say, ‘I nebber see a bull widout a tongue. How is dis, Anancy?’ And Anancy him see dat his game is up, and he get frightened, and run all across de Palace roofs and so escape and save himself. And dat’s why Anancy always spins ropes, honey, ’cos he know him found out sometimes, and he want de ropes to save himself wid!”

Ellice went on into the verandah, smiling to herself over the story, to which the cook and the other girl were listening with as close an attention as the baby’s. How like children the black people were to hang so breathlessly on such a fairy tale! She had forgotten all about the old man and Lily Scott by the time she strolled up to the bookcase and aimlessly took down the old slave book of Mafoota again.

The book fascinated Ellice, and she was beginning to under-

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stand it by the light of a new horror revealed by Uncle Dick's careless explanation of Jersey King's presence in his house—ay! and of Lily Scott's too. When the children of the slave list were quadroons they owned no surname, she noticed, but even they—the children of the white owners of Mafoota in all probability—did not always escape employment at their master's will. One boy was apprenticed to a mason—another was a domestic servant. She wondered the kindly old roof had stood so long over such iniquities as they seemed to her. . . . Further on she came to a list of the clothing served out to all these people, of the cattle owned by the slaves themselves, and a still quaint memorandum of Negroes with the old names given them when first brought from Africa, and the Christian alternatives given them by their pious owners! “Bacchus” had become Thomas S. Wright, “Brutus” was the very Philip Scarlett of the former list, “London” had changed to Leonard Parkinson. She found remarks on their dispositions too—“Seemingly well disposed,” “Gets drunk,” “Indifferent”—but the most hideous detail of all to her horrified mind was always the price of these men and women. The mere historical facts that she had learned of slavery and its abolition—“William Wilberforce's name will be forever associated with the glorious humanity of Great Britain in first setting free the unfortunate slaves, etc.,” in mechanical school routine—did not for a moment bring it home to her as did those simple, practical figures and columns in the old account book. Some of the men, in full working power, were valued at £160—even at £200; but the women never ranged over £160. Their highest price seemed to be when they were between eleven and thirty, whereas the boys were not of the same value until fourteen or fifteen. Ellice, in her ignorance, wondered why, for if the owners looked on them as mere beasts of burden, strength should surely have been worth more than any other quality. That the women

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could have another use, which ranged their value with the cows and mares in the great breeding pastures, was mercifully unguessed by her, as much as their maturity at an earlier age than Europeans. It was bad enough in her judgment as it was; she shut the book at last as if she shut in the frailties of human nature a century ago with the closing pages.

As she was putting the book back on the shelf between the "History of Jamaica" and the "Diseases of Cattle," a sheet of loose notepaper fell at her feet—whether from the volume she was replacing or from one of the others she could not tell. It did not look like a private letter, though it was written on cheap notepaper, and appeared rather to be a kind of receipt written in an illiterate, scrawling hand. Her first thought was that one of the servants—the cook for choice—had been copying something out of the volume of Mrs. Beeton which she had introduced into the kitchen, and she puzzled out a few words without any meaning entering her brain.

"Take lover penknife cut your finger, squeeze the blood in a de wine glass, quarter nutmeg in a de blood mix it and put de wine glass in a de"—

"What nonsense!" said Ellice, too impatient to read further. "It must belong to one of the coloured people." She thrust it carelessly between the History and the Cattle book, and went out to the verandah to look for Dick Pryce, for it was past his usual hour for riding in to luncheon. He was not there, however, and George Saunders, coming up from the far pastures of Five Corners and Savoy, informed her that the Penn-keeper had gone out to Endeavour to lunch, and would not be back until the evening—he had sent her the message which Saunders, to her discomfort, lingered to deliver.

"There's some row with the niggers over at Endeavour," he volunteered.

"Mr. Platt seems singularly unable to manage his labourers!"

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remarked Ellice curtly. "We are always having to complain of them in some way or other. Do you know why my uncle is involved in it?"

"Oh, there's some suspicion of Obeah being worked, and they want the man who does it."

"Obeah!" said Ellice vaguely. "Oh, spells." She dismissed it without comprehension, but with some idea of the superstitions of England, to which salt thrown over one's left shoulder is an antidote. "Does Uncle Dick suspect his own men?"

"Not much!" Saunders laughed, and showed a beautiful set of teeth. He leaned a muscular shoulder against the doorway in which Ellice was sitting in her rocking-chair, and looked sideways at her shining head. She purposely forebore to glance up, for his brown skin made her civility of a somewhat strained character, when it was forced upon her notice.

"Some of the cows at Endeavour have been sick," he remarked explanatively. "And Platt thinks they are poisoned. He's overreached himself this time, in my opinion—I believe it's simply fever. One of our Herefords looks a bit dicky to-day, to my mind."

"Has Uncle Dick gone to help doctor them?" Ellice said wonderingly.

Saunders laughed again. "They would think small fry of themselves at Endeavour if they had to call in a doctor from Mafoota!" he said. "No, Arbuthnott's good enough for a Vet., I believe. But the man that Platt suspects has been seen over our way, and I expect Mr. Pryce has gone to hear the whole story and decide what's to be done. It's serious if the Niggers begin playing tricks with Obeah."

"Why, it's nothing! Uncle Dick told me himself that they had once put a lot of eggshells and old bottles in Aquaduct and expected him to die in consequence!" Ellice was frank in

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scorn, and raised her cold bluish eyes to the young man's dusky face without thinking.

"It's not only eggshells sometimes," he said meaningly. "It's all sorts of herbs, and poisonous ones, too! They know too much, some of these old Africans."

"Who is the man they suspect?"

"Quite an old man named David Wilts. I don't suppose you've ever seen him. Haven't set eyes on him myself for months. I thought he died during the wet season. He lives out at New Orleans."

"An old man—an African, did you say?" repeated Ellice with slow conviction. She thought of the tattered figure and the animal face that she had seen in company with Lily Scott, and her troubled mind tried to piece in a possible reason. Perhaps the housekeeper had known the old Negro for years—she had been some five at Mafoota—perhaps she pitied him for his destitution and evil repute—perhaps—

"Yes. A few of the older people are distinctly African in type—some are still actually imported from the Gold Coast. Not as slaves, of course."

"No, of course."

He looked at her absent face and admired the white skin and sunny hair with dangerous eyes—full brown eyes, whose setting and expression were undeniable.

"Old Martha Hughes who helps here on washing days is an African. She has a small holding of her own out past the Home Pastures. I'm riding that way this afternoon—if you'd like to come part of the way I would show you plenty of types?"

Ellice lifted her head, startled. Hitherto even Jersey King had never ventured to suggest her riding with him, and George Saunders and Arnold Whitworth were some way behind Jersey in encroaching. The shock of the advance gave her a feeling of personal insecurity—not because Saunders had made the

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suggestion with anything beyond courtesy, but because she recognised the attraction in herself which must have caused it, and read the confirmation in his sleepy, tropical eyes. She rose from the rocking-chair, quite deliberately, but with a finality that checked the conversation.

"Thank you very much. But I am not riding this afternoon. I will notice Martha Hughes when she next comes here—it is interesting, as you suggest, to see the different types."

She hoped she had been gracious in her gainsaying, her mind shuddering a little from the realization that this man also represented a "type," could one but acknowledge it—the third or fourth generation in colour no doubt, but a half-breed, after all. He looked a trifle sullen or defiant as he followed her into the inner hall where luncheon was waiting, and she thought he murmured that there was no harm in the offer, but she did not continue the conversation, and ate her meal in silence, wishing childishly for the protecting presence of Uncle Dick. For the first time the loneliness of Mafoota seemed a menace rather than a refuge. She longed for the sense of policed security that hums in a city, and the wild green earth was as lawless from men as when God first created it.

Mr. Pryce did not return during the afternoon, and supper was kept about for him after the others had had their meal. When he rode in it was dark, the time past eight o'clock, and Ellice sat down to the deserted table to keep him company, though she had eaten all she wished. They had it to themselves to her satisfaction, for the younger men had as usual followed Lily Scott on to the verandah. The low sound of their careless laughter and chaff came half inaudibly through the jalousies of the inner hall, where the meal was laid, and the smell of green tobacco was distinguishable above the odours of the night. Sometimes Ellice wished that there were bookkeepers' barracks at Mafoota as on other Penns.

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"You look very tired, Uncle Dick!" she said tenderly, slipping her hand onto his knee as she sat beside him.

"I've been in the saddle all day, honey. And I'm not so young as I was once, that's the truth. I'll go straight to bed after my smoke."

Indeed the lids were even now fain to close over his sunburnt eyes, though he smiled at her restfully.

"Did you find the Obeah man, Uncle?"

"We found his den," said Dick Pryce, grimly. "And a precious hunt we had for it, too. It's away up in the hills beyond Boundary Common at a place called New Orleans—such a sty! Enough to give any one typhoid but a Nigger. Eggshells and grave dirt and bullock's blood and all the rest of the filthy list. We took a few samples, and the police from Montego Bay will be up to-morrow. I don't suppose he'll turn up himself, though."

"What has he done?" asked Ellice in a troubled tone, wondering if she ought to mention Lily's pensioner.

"Platt thinks he's poisoned the cows—at least he says so. I fancy in his own heart he believes in the Obeah spells, and funks the whole business. The old man—David Wilts—has a spite on Platt, and put a few lumps of earth and feathers on his doorstep, and then the cows got a run of fever and he said they were poisoned—as like as not to set the police on Wilts and get rid of him!"

"You don't think they were poisoned, then, Uncle?"

"No, Niece. Our own cows have had fever from some slight cause we can hardly trace, times enough. They only want treatment. Arbuthnott was using lovely language at all the needless fuss, I'm d—d sure! Platt sent him on half a dozen fool's errands."

"Uncle Dick, there was an old man hanging round the

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kitchens to-day, the servants said, come to beg, I think. Could that have been the man?"

"Like as not—I'll speak to Mary to-morrow. But I don't believe Wilts would do any harm, beyond frightening the other niggers. About here, did you say? I hope the poor devil got clean out of the way, then. We couldn't have done anything before we found the eggshells and things, but now if he goes back they'll hook him. Platt's a white-livered skunk! The only brains he has are in cheating. He runs Endeavour on the cheat from end to end!"

"Does Penn-keeping pay, Uncle?"

"Sometimes, honey. You have to make mistakes now and again, and be wiser next time. We learn by our failures—nobody ever learned anything by success!"

The deep eyes twinkled as he rose from the table, yawned, and kissed the girl a hearty good night. Ellice responded in silence. She went to her room when he went to his, for she had no desire to join the bookkeepers, but she lingered about for a while, thinking, before she got into bed. Mr. Pryce's last words had made her wonder a little. Did one learn by failure? The failure of her life as yet had, in her own opinion, been her marriage. It seemed a ghastly, undeniable mistake. Yet, had it not happened, or had she found it quietly tolerable, she would have settled down in humdrum fashion, and never got out of the bandbox of English life where she had been imprisoned by tradition. It was a comfortable bandbox no doubt—more comfortable than the pain and experience which had landed her in Mafoota, but had she remained there she would never have developed even as far as she had. There would have been no possibilities in her life such as vaguely surmised themselves to her even now—she would not have been discontented simply because she would not have known that there was anything deeper or wider than the monotony

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of her specified existence. No, better on the whole to bear the discomfort of losing the old boundaries and using untried feet in a larger world, than the mere vitality of the vegetable.

She got into bed at last hard on eleven, and fell asleep; but it was not more than two hours later that she was awakened by a step on the verandah next her own, and Jersey King's voice calling Mr. Pryce. It appeared as if there were some difficulty in rousing him, and Ellice, remembering his weariness, jumped out of bed indignantly, and, slipping into a wrapper, ran out onto the verandah also.

"What is the matter?" she asked under her breath, looking at the dark figure of the young man who was standing at the bolted jalousies of the next room. She could just see, by the lantern he carried in his hand, that he was bare-legged, though his feet were thrust into shoes, and that his coat was buttoned over his chest and round his neck without collar or shirt. It was evident that he also had risen from bed in a hurry. He hesitated at the white vision of Ellice and came close to the screen which divided her verandah from the one in which he stood, and round which she was leaning to speak to him.

"The Hereford cow is worse, and one of the stablemen came to rouse me. I am afraid I ought to tell Mr. Pryce."

"Can't you doctor her without him?" she pleaded, her eyes staring at him through the darkness. There was no moon, and the bigger stars seemed to have set, so that the night appeared fathomless. She thought of two lines of poetry she did not know that she remembered as she looked up at the Heavens:

"Solemn with moonlight, or with stars thrilled through,
Or quite unlit, but passionately blue!"

"Oh, I can manage all right, but I thought he would want to be told," said King with characteristic assurance.

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"He was so tired—do not rouse him unless you must!" said Ellice anxiously. "If you like, I will take all responsibility—I will say I asked you not."

He still hesitated. "Oh, well, if you like to do that! I must be off then—I ought to be there now."

He turned away, but her voice went after him into the darkness.

"Can you wait a minute? I'm coming too."

"Make haste, then," he said with some irresolution. Ellice ran back into her room, thrust her bare feet into the old brown riding boots, and flinging off her wrapper, slipped her mackintosh over her white night dress. It was too long, but a belt hastily fastened round her waist enabled her to kilt it up out of her way. She was not two minutes before she had joined Jersey King at the back entrance of the house, to which he seemed to have the key, and they set off almost at a run for the stables.

"Can you see? Don't trip—take my hand!" he said authoritatively, the swinging lantern casting delusive beams about them. The grass felt strange under her feet in the depth of night, and their two hurrying figures seemed part of a mad adventure. Strange, too, the arc of the Heavens,

"Quite unlit, but passionately blue!"

and the sense of being in the open air at this anomalous hour. The horizon was lost, and the outside world was boundless. She put her hand into Jersey King's as he suggested, with no more thought for his hard man's fingers clasping her own than if she had been a child. He almost dragged her beyond her pace, and she was panting when they passed the stable gates and crossed the yard to the stall where the sick cow lay. Two men were watching her with lanterns like Jersey's, and the light struck up into the broad rafters of her wide stall, and

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shone on her smooth panting sides. It was evident, even to Ellice, that the poor beast was very sick, and her heart contracted as it always did at the sight of suffering, even while she was still conscious of an odd exultation, the sense of adventure in this midnight excursion that pushed England into another universe in its total dissimulation.

"Can I help at all?" she said to King, conscious of the blank stare on the faces of the black men at sight of her.

"Yes—hold the lantern," he said curtly, putting it into her hand with scant ceremony, and showing her how to manage the light to give him the best assistance. He took the animal's temperature in a businesslike fashion, and produced a bottle from his coat pocket which he uncorked. Ellice uttered a low exclamation, for the strong scent of rum in her nostrils betrayed its contents.

"Surely you are not going to give her spirits!"

"It's the only chance. She was drenched hours ago, and it has made her weak—that and the fever. Here, Bailey, get your hands under her head."

One of the black men lifted the cow's head and opened her mouth, while Jersey King poured the contents of the bottle gently down her throat. Ellice found herself holding her breath as the animal struggled and coughed, but she was too weak to resist, and swallowed the stimulant with less trouble than if she had been well. Jersey stroked the soft throat, soothing and encouraging her, and then stood watching her as she settled down again on the dried Guinea grass.

"She seems easier!" said Ellice, after a few minutes.

"She's half drunk!" he returned with a subdued laugh. She recognised the same quality of suppressed excitement in it as troubled her own veins, and wondered if it were the responsibility she had forced upon him. "I expect I shall have to repeat the dose, too, in an hour or so. If we can feed the

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fever sufficiently she'll pull through. But her temperature is 106."

They stood for another five minutes watching the invalid, their strained attention seeming in a curious fashion the expression of something more subtle than the work in hand. There were faint noises in the stillness—the rattle of a halter jerking the iron ring, the sudden uneasy roar of the great Hereford bull, who, in a stall near-by, seemed to discern and resent the ministrations to a lady of his harem. Ellice started and moved instinctively closer to Jersey as the savage sound fell on her ears. She felt his hand close again over hers that held the lantern, as if to reassure her, and nearly dropped the light.

"Go and see if the bull is all right," he said abruptly to the men. She wished he had not given the order, which she could not deprecate as it was obviously on her behalf; but the sight of the shambling dark figures vanishing into gloom at the further end of the stalls gave her a sense of lost chaperonage. She slipped her hand out of Jersey's and stood beside him restlessly, looking at the sleeping cow. His own eyes were on the creature also, to Ellice's relief; but she did not realise the significance of danger in this. In his own mind the young man was madly conscious of the rope of fair hair twisted carelessly out of her way, and of her fair cold face in the light of the lanterns. He dared not look at her. He began to speak to ease his leaping pulses, fast and oddly.

"It's strange our being here like this, isn't it—"

"Doctoring a sick cow?" she asked, her own voice shaken with an unsteady little laugh.

"Anyhow—together—out in the night—"

There was no chance to answer while her breath played her false like this.

"Every one else is asleep!" he said.

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"Except those two men—"

"Niggers don't count—"

She hesitated, with a wild impulse towards flight. The night pricked her with an electric sense of nearness. She was scared, and indignant.

Suddenly his hand had closed on hers again. He was speaking fast and breathlessly in her ear—a jumble of words that she did not understand. His hot face and young eyes were thrust close to her own, and through the dim lantern light she saw the veins corded on his temples and felt him push close to her, devouring her with his gaze. The bull roared again, protesting, calling to the sick cow.

Back on Ellice's memory flashed the firelit room in far Devon, and another man's face, stammering, protesting. She turned to fly, and Jersey King caught her roughly and kissed her reluctant throat, the head strained away from him. His lips bruised the white flesh before he released her.

"There!" he said thickly. "That's for tempting me. I could feel you all through that cloak, without a touch—you stood too naer! You always take it for granted I'm not to know that you're a woman, don't you? Well, you'll do that once too often!"

Then he let her go, and as if to show that he still had control of himself called strongly to one of the men.

"Bailey! Bring that lantern and light Miss Honouram back to the house. I shan't want you any more."

Ellice turned as if the words were a twofold dismissal, and followed the bobbing light that went ahead. She was shocked and shamed—but this time her rage was for herself. The man went free of her, to a tribunal of his own senses. She could not judge of something she had not experienced.

CHAPTER X

"Gold on her head, and gold on her feet
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet
And a golden girdle around my sweet.

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If I were rich I would kiss her feet,
I would kiss the place where the gold hems meet,
And the golden girdle around my sweet—"

WILLIAM MORRIS.

THERE is what purports to be a Negro alphabet in Jamaica, though it was in all probability composed by one of the white population whose satire finds its vent in several of the lines, but more particularly in that under the letter I—

"I is a gentleman, berry well-bred!"

This, the speaker's opinion of himself, is sufficiently characteristic of the Negro who has picked up enough of custom to understand that the term is usually denied to his class. He is arrogant in applying it, just as in the B line of the alphabet he emphatically condemns the white man (Buckra)—

"B is for Buckra, a berry bad man!"

Arbuthnott might have grimly instanced his employer as the subject of the first quoted line, for Mr. Platt's opinion of himself as owner of Endeavour was distinctly that he was a gentleman—every bit as good as the white family named Carter whom he had supplanted, and a much sharper man of business. The breeding he included as a small detail that followed logically on his being a gentleman, and he was naïve enough to regard the sharp practice of his business habits as amongst his

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advantages, and to cherish unspoken aspirations of marrying a white woman. Sometimes his total incapacity even to understand the quality of honour in small things as well as in great gave Arbuthnott a momentary maddened feeling that tempted him to take his employer by the throat and teach him that at least honesty is the best policy, by aid of his stock whip—an old heredity instinct, perhaps, guided by the experience gained of old in the methods of White with Black. For it was not only that Mr. Platt did not scruple to take advantage of his neighbour on every possible occasion, or that he regarded lying, cheating, and bullying as valuable and necessary business qualities; he simply did not understand what was meant between Englishmen or Creoles by fair dealing, any more than a monkey could understand it. He knew, however, that such foolish sense of obligation did bind white men, and regarded it as a special provision of Providence for the black who was cute enough to turn it to his own account. If he had not loved the insolence of lording it over an Englishman he would never have kept Ronald Arbuthnott as his busha, for he was as impossible to inoculate with Negro traits as Henry Platt with English, and the doctrine of "Cheat whom you can" found no answering capacity in him.

It was a lonely life at Endeavour—a life so bare of all loveliness or clean association that sometimes Ronald Arbuthnott wondered at himself to remember the months, stretching backwards into two years, that he had spent there. Even his sojourn in the District known by the name of Look Behind seemed desirable by contrast, and he had wondered after the first six months if he would not drift back eventually, and earn his food by the strength of his hands, until there came a day when he could work no longer. . . . He sometimes thought it would be a gentle ending to a hard life to creep up as far as the great Cockpits and die in the untamed land there. He had

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been driven North by sheer lack of employment and the necessity of life still strong in his veins, and had taken bitter service under Henry Platt. The wage paid him was fair—he had forced that from his close-fisted employer—and wants were few at Endeavour. One suit of clothes was all that existence demanded, and that he had a sufficiency of shirts to effect any changes was his own choice—neither example or exaction on the part of his employer would have necessitated them. In his narrow room at the back of the house, Arbuthnott's daily surroundings consisted of a low pallet bed, a tin basin and can on a wooden table, and a square of looking-glass before which he doggedly shaved his square chin, besides the one hook behind the door on which he hung most of his wardrobe when he was not actually wearing it. There was also the portmanteau that held the clean linen aforesaid, and a rough shelf with some books on it, which Mr. Platt could not have read even if he had opened them, save the volume of Shelley, and that he would not have understood though he could read English—the English, that is, of the *Gleaner* and the *Telegraph*. Arbuthnott seldom or never read the Jamaican papers, any more than Mr. Platt would have done his books, and found his literary solace in the minute library which consisted of a Homer, the "Alcestis" of Euripides, Plato, Horace, and the Vulpius Catullus—all with the name of his College written in a boyish hand, with an affectation of the Greek E. In the days when he bought the Euripides and the Catullus he had had ambitions of taking classical honours. He smiled sometimes now with tired irony as he turned the well-smoked pages, and dropped coarse white ash from native cigarettes on the lines that had been baptized from a well-worn briar in his Balliol days.

Why he had come to Endeavour he had never shirked to tell himself—lack of actual food, and the dread of becoming an object of charity at last, had driven him to "Platt's." Failure

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had been so bitter to him that it had forced him back on a last remnant of pride—the determination to ask no more help from Home. The man without capital in any Colony is in a worse case in reality than if he walks the streets in England, particularly if he is not a native to the climate, and cannot compete with the labourer either physically or in moral hypocrisy. Arbuthnott knew and acknowledged why he had come to Endeavour; he had not examined himself as to why he was staying on there. There are some things that every man is loth to face. He knew that if he came to conclusions as to his fundamental reason, he would call himself a hard name, if he could not decide on a new course of action. He had not the courage for either as yet.

In the mean while he had other consolations less harmless than his books. Well, all men round him did the same. The great warmth of the Tropics teemed with life—it was Nature's instinct to breed and breed, and the sap rose eternally. The ugly bare room did not always make the first picture for Arbuthnott's waking eyes; sometimes he saw the sun come up over a tuft of cocoanuts, and throw ragged shadows on a banana patch. The cool day came to refresh the natural animal in him, and he rose up and went back to civilization unquestioned by Henry Platt, who regarded certain indulgences in the same category as eating and drinking—so essential to existence that they could not be economised. Besides, Arbuthnott was of a type which says Yes or No for itself.

He greeted the sun under a free Heaven on the morning after Mr. Pryce had returned home dead-tired from the raid on the Obeah hut. Arbuthnott had been tired also, but, man being an illogical animal, the very association with the Penn-keeper had driven him into restlessness that required an antidote. Because he craved for one woman—set out of reach of such failures as himself, in the safety of Dick Pryce's assured

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home—he went for consolation down to the lowest rung of his social ladder, and, being a man, did not despise himself for behaving like a beast. The thing was legitimised by custom. Young blood, and the pulse of the Tropics, sent men to the compensation offered by the country in which they found themselves—compensation as easily obtained amongst the Natives as if licensed by unwritten law. He thought he had more excuse than most. Lacking the star, in fact, he flung himself upon the dunghill, and found his antidote in the little Negro hut under the cocoanuts, upon the boundaries of Endeavour.

The light was barely sunrise as he rode by the far pastures of Plymouth and Banana Patch towards Tom Tidler's Ground, where he had once seen a boyish figure sitting in the saddle whilst it betrayed the secret of a black ribbon and a gold ring to his aching eyes. He had been further up the rising land then, in Hill Pasture; . . . the memory stung him even now, and brought back the pang of yesterday, drugged to shameful sleep by something he did not care to think of in connection with that picture. He quickened his pony, and went on through a bit of wooded land, and skirted Mount Edgecombe—all the Mafoota Penn—until he struck the little stream that raced past the old house a mile or so away. It was but a shallow water here, but he knew a pool, and turning his pony free to crop, he stripped off his flannel shirt and trousers, and rolling them into a bundle placed them gingerly on a flat shelf of rock. Ticks were less likely here, and he stepped as Adam's son into the cool whirling water. It was a primeval bath in the solitude of morning, hardly to be accomplished save by throwing oneself flat upon the clean gravel bed of the stream, and coaxing the running water to flash and flow over thighs and breast. The man sighed in concert with the plaintive ripple, half with pleasure to feel the pulse of the steady stream, half with regret to meet the sun. For the first red flush was

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in the East, and the long trails of mist were being gathered up as by a magnet from the awakening valley. The light had no warmth as yet, and the mystery of dawn was a thing as wonderful as the Creation—order out of chaos, light and definite form from the great void of night.

Arbuthnott rubbed himself as dry as circumstances would permit with the ragged towel thrust under the flap of his saddle. He was an adept at holding such accessories with his knee, and had remembered to bring it from Endeavour the night before, with a preconception that revolted him a little now. Well, a bath was an Englishman's necessity. He dressed himself without aid of a glass, caught his pony, and rode down the course of the stream, not acknowledging even to himself that it was leading him to John Crow's Land—to Cocoanuts—to the bridge—and to Mafoota House. He had an unassuaged desire to look at the sleeping roof for a brief instant—only an instant. The sun was not yet up, and the earliest stir in the household would not be yet, to betray him.

He rode along the further bank of the stream, until it showed him the road—a surmised thing, grey and indefinite in the dawn, leading nowhere. Now to his left again was the bridge, but he passed it and went on to the fording place where Jersey King had driven Ellice over on her arrival. The pony splashed obediently through the water, and brought him out on the grassy slope almost opposite the house—only the protection of the stone walls of the stable afforded a shelter if any one should discover him, and here he drew rein and sat looking—looking—

And then, quite suddenly, he became aware of a living thing in the picture before him. The house was as quiet as if visibly asleep: upon the pointed gable two great scavenger birds sat with humped backs—spectres of silence. They slept also—slumber wrapped all existence at Mafoota in a veil of innocence. All save—what? He turned so cautiously that he was hardly

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aware himself of his movement, and looked with keen hard eyes at this waking thing that had no right to be awake and moving.

The figure had emerged into sight round the western corner of the house, and was passing along by the north verandah, outside, however, until it reached the steps. It was cloaked, and bent so low, running like a guilty thing that fears detection, that Arbuthnott could not at first tell if it were man or woman. As it rose from its couchant attitude to step into the verandah, he saw that it was the latter, and the next instant had stifled the startled cry that almost escaped him. Before the fleeing, mysterious thing had passed the east corner of the house, he had dropped from his saddle and turned his pony loose to crop again, and was running through the dew-wet grass up the slope to the more orderly portion of the garden. He did not follow into the verandah—he passed below it, screened by the covered-in eastern side that was practically a room, until he came under Ellice Hillier's windows. There he stopped short, but had hardly paused an instant before he saw just what he had come to see.

From the screen dividing the verandah where Ellice's privacy might have been intruded upon by the household, came a long bare arm and hand. The person on the east verandah whom he had been following was no more visible to him than he to her, but he watched as if fascinated the largely moulded olive-skinned fingers feeling restlessly along the floor of the verandah until they found the edge. Between the supports of the flooring and the rail was a ledge that would answer her purpose, and he knew what she meant to deposit there. While he waited he saw another brown arm shoot past the screen, and in the shapely hand was just what he expected—a round ball of earth with two feathers and something like a rusty nail stuck into it. She was feeling for the right spot to deposit it, the ledge where

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it might lie undiscovered, when he made a step forward and seized both the strong wrists.

"Drop it!" he said through shut teeth.

She did not betray herself by the shriek he had expected. He heard the indrawn hissing breath like a sob, and it unnerved him more than a cry because it was a European sign of emotion—the white blood in her, not the black. But he felt the brown wrists writhe and struggle to escape, and he tightened his grip cruelly. He had not known that he could be so indifferent to hurting a woman. Utterly callous to the tortured flesh, he dropped one wrist and clung to the other with a clasp like tempered steel, so that with the aid of his grip and his left hand upon the railing he could swing himself up to a precarious foothold, on the very ledge of the verandah where she had tried to "set Obeah." Then, his action having dragged her to her feet, their faces met at the narrow slit between the screen and the corner of the covered-in portion of the verandah. He had seen beauty distorted to ugliness before, but he had never seen anything so bestial, so livid with thwarted rage and fear, as Lily Scott looked then. She was mad with her own lawless passions, and all the white in her seemed to have died out in that hissing breath, leaving only the straining eyeballs and the coarsened lips of the Negress.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded fiercely.

"Ask yourself!" she retorted with a half brazen, half terrified insolence, that made him marvel; he had seen it so often on broad, coloured faces that he had dismissed with supreme contempt. "What are *you* doing here under a woman's window, Busha? That's your game, is it! There's more onto her than yourself, though—I'll tell you!" The thick lips drew back from the white teeth and she panted with jealous rage. They had both spoken in whispers, but he glanced across the verandah apprehensively, towards the closed jalousies that were so near—so near!

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"Hush-sh!" he said warningly. "You don't want any one else to know what a fool you've made of yourself, do you?"

"Fool!" She caught up the word savagely. "No more a fool than some others—you among the number. You think her sickly white face means innocence, don't you! Oh yes!—and she out of the house at midnight with some of the men—last night—doctoring a sick cow—I'll tell you—hours together!" Her words broke with passion and her own thick utterance. "Then she came running—frightened—afraid some one would know what she'd been after! I saw her—she and Jersey King—down there alone—at night—"

"Hold your cursed tongue!" he said so suddenly and fiercely that she cringed and whimpered, afraid, even in her madness, of the white man's wrath and the devilish eyes close to her own. He was without pity or remembrance of her sex. To him she was only a loathsome thing, spitting venom on the fair name of a white woman—her own origin and race so low in comparison that he could have felt almost justified in strangling her for her insolence. And she looked in his face and knew it all with the inherited instinct of long generations behind her—knew that, had she succeeded in attracting him as she had tried to do according to her nature when they first met, she would only have been good enough for the toy of a few months, weeks, days; but that when he offered real homage to a woman meet to be his mate, he placed her on so high a standard that she—the Black—was not formed of the same clay, to his mind.

Lily Scott relapsed into sullen silence, trembling a little with the wrack of her own passion and dread of that look in his eyes. She did not attempt to free herself, but stood with her bruised wrist in his grasp, her face suddenly re-endowed with beauty from the tragedy that had fallen upon it, while she awaited sentence.

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"You were trying to work Obeah on Miss Honouram!" he said harshly.

"Yes!—"

"You got those filthy tools from old David Wilts, I suppose?"

She shuddered a little, as if from dread of his irreverence in speaking of the spells in which she had an ingrain belief, for all her pretended superiority to the Negroes.

"Yes!"—she said again.

"Well, I won't ask you where he is, though I suppose you were his accomplice while he led us a pretty dance yesterday. But I tell you this,"—he spoke brutally through his teeth—"if we have any more of your fooling with Obeah you'll be found out, and I for one won't keep you from the police! You know the penalty."

Suddenly she began to cry, the great tears rolling out of her liquid eyes and down her pale cheeks, while she caught her breath. Another man might have felt some compunction at the convulsed beauty of her face; but Arbuthnott only thanked Heaven that she did not wail aloud, after the fashion of the true Black, but suppressed her sobs as she had her first cry. He shook her slightly through the arm he still grasped.

"Don't do that!" he commanded. "Pick up all that nonsense and throw it in the fire—do you hear? I don't care two straws for the rubbish you leave lying about on doorsteps or under the roof, but if it comes to the cassava trick and the poison that follows (I've seen it done, mind you!) I'll hound you out of doors and in till I land you in prison or at the gallows. And if Miss Honouram is ailing in the least degree it will be the worse for you, do you hear?"

She not only heard, but was frightened. The tears were still running down her face, but it was at the mere threats that impressed her. There was something so relentless in the iron anger of Arbuthnott's face that she shook under it with a terror

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greater than she would have shown to the exponent of Obeah. There was no assurance needed to impress on her that if Ellice suffered she herself was doomed—she knew it in every quivering responsive nerve. When he loosened her wrist and told her with contempt to pick up the component parts of the charm that she had dropped, she did so without attempting to run away. Only as she saw him turn to swing himself over the verandah at last, she uttered one faint piteous plea for herself.

“Mister Arbuthnott!” whispered the faltering voice, and she laid a trembling hand on the hard, unresponsive shoulder, speaking to his averted face. “You won’t tell of me if I promise not to harm her? I should be sent away—and I can’t—I can’t go away!”

“You should have thought of that before!” he said drily, hardly pausing for her words. Men are not inclined to mercy towards one woman who threatens another whom they love.

“I couldn’t think—I couldn’t care for anything except that she came between us! My heart’s just all water for Jersey—and they were together out there half the night!” Again the indignation that could only judge by its own experience swept a flame into her eyes. “Oh, I hate her! She stole him—I just wanted to kill her! I wouldn’t much mind what happened to me after, either.”

“Go into the house and burn that rubbish, and don’t be a little fool!” said Arbuthnott coolly. “Do you suppose that Miss Honouram would look at her uncle’s bookkeeper? I can assure you that if Mr. King misconstrues her civility he is under as great a delusion as you. She will not waste a second thought on any one at Mafoota!”

There was a trace of bitterness in the words, born of his knowledge of the black cord and the gold ring hanging on Ellice Hillier’s white breast. But to Lily Scott they expressed

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a very different meaning, and brought her hope. She thought, judging always from herself, that there must have been some sort of understanding between Arbuthnott and Ellice, to make him speak with such authority; and though she did not believe in faithfulness even in women, she turned with more content in her submission and hurried back to the kitchen to burn the evidences of her attempted witchcraft, as he had ordered.

Arbuthnott himself dropped quickly to the ground again and made off down the slope in search of his pony. It was high time, for the sun was up in earnest, and he heard sounds of movement in the stables even as he caught the quietly cropping beast and digging in his heels rode straight for the river. He wondered a little as he went over the details of his late experience, which he had hardly had time to consider at the time. Obeah should be "set" at midnight and not at cockcrow, and it was probable that old David Wilts had been hidden somewhere at Mafoota and had placed the charm near the house at that hour, but Lily, thinking to make it more efficacious, had moved it to the actual spot where Ellice was sleeping, in the dawn. His one fear was not the foolish clay ball, but the insidious poisons really known to the Natives, and which leave no trace. It would be easy in Lily Scott's position to adulterate Ellice's food without the rest of the household suffering, and he shuddered as possibility after possibility rose in his mind. If David Wilts were still at Mafoota, however, he had an excuse for confiding the incident to Dick Pryce, for he could say he had got upon the track of the old African and was wandering about in search of him when he chanced on Lily and her spell. It was not his wish to announce his own presence at such an hour so near the sleeping house, and—and—other incidents of the night might be surmised if not discovered. Arbuthnott set his lips. But across his reluctant shame fell the image of the one

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woman he desired to shield, and there remained to him the saving grace of his manhood—the sacrifice of self for the beloved object. As he rode tiredly into the broad glare of sun round the white wall of Endeavour, he had settled his decision. Let come what might as to his part of the affair, he must tell Dick Pryce.

CHAPTER XI

"Gold hair, cold hair! Daughter to a King!
Wrapt in bonds of snow-white silk with jewels glittering,
.
I was but a peasant lass, my babe had but the milk,
Gold hair, cold hair! Raimented in silk!"

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

ALCOHOL seemed to agree with the Hereford cow, for she took a turn for the better after Jersey King's stringent doses, and in a few days was promoted to mere quinine and tending. This was a relief to Ellice's mind, for she did not know how the Penn-keeper might take her show of authority in the matter in leaving him undisturbed, and though she could, and would willingly, have bought another to fill her place had the creature died, there was always the difficulty of explaining her possession of money.

Dick Pryce took the whole affair as a good joke—or appeared to do so; though had the Hereford been lost he might have blamed Jersey King for not rousing him. As it was he teased Ellice almost to the bounds of her endurance anent her mid-night escapade, and consulted her with intention upon the slightest ailment among the stock. It would not have mattered, and the girl would have laughed it off, but for the stinging memory of her humiliation at King's hands; but when Dick Pryce began calling her "Busha" before the younger man, and alluded to her veterinary skill, the blood seemed to burn all over her fair body with her intense discomfort, and she found it hard to resist turning her back upon him. No word of reference to his audacity had taken place between them. Ellice felt her own fault in disregarding conventional barriers on that

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occasion, so keenly, that she dared not resent the advantage he had taken, and beyond treating him with a rather distant courtesy she ignored the whole matter. Once or twice she thought he made an effort to speak to her alone, but her precautions against such a thing were so strict that he never succeeded, and she put down his madness in the stable to the excitement of the novel situation, the hour, and the lack of reserve on her own part.

She could not avoid pretending an interest in the sick cow at least, and going down to the stable to see her, if only to justify her action of the night, but she was scrupulous in going one morning when she knew that none of the bookkeepers could be anywhere in the stable, and waited about with some excuse or other to see them ride off to the pastures before she ventured down to look at the patient. To her surprise she found that she was not the only visitor—Lily Scott was standing just where Jersey had stood on the eventful night, looking at the recumbent animal. She turned sharply as Ellice joined her, and her black brows met in an unmistakable frown. Had Ellice not been so taken up with her own mental turmoil she would have noticed that for the last twenty-four hours at least Lily had treated her with sullen suspicion—a sort of armed truce that suggested the possibility of open battle some day.

“She looks much better, don’t you think so?” Ellice said with an effort. She made her aimless remark merely for the sake of saying something, for the memories that haunted the place were intolerable.

“I don’t know—I didn’t see her when she was so bad, as you did!” said Lily with a suppressed taunt in her tone. “I don’t profess to doctor the stock!”

Ellice did not answer. She was rather uneasily watching three or four stablemen who were cleaning down the stalls. They had reached that of the great bull, and she wondered

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if they were going to lead him out of his place and tie him up somewhere else while they washed out his residence and laid fresh bedding. She had seen them run him round the yard once for her especial benefit, from behind the safe bars of the gates, but she remembered that it had taken three men to keep him in check, and she was always a little afraid even of the great sluggish bullocks when she was on foot—let alone this king of the yard.

“I suppose you’ve come down to see after her yourself again?” said Lily with the same sour suggestion of humour.

“No, I only came to see— Do you know I think we had better get out of the yard if they are going to move the bull,” said Ellice hurriedly, putting her hand upon Lily’s arm mechanically, and drawing her towards the gates.

But to her surprise the other girl flung her off so roughly as to be almost an assault. Her eyes blazed as if the touch had been a spark to gunpowder, and her lips protruded as she tried to speak.

“What do you mean?” she said fiercely. “Don’t go touching me! I don’t want your——hands on my arm!” (She used a foul word that struck Ellice dumb.) “I’m not a man—you can keep your pawing for them! I’m—”

The torrent of words ended in a shriek of such terror as seemed to turn all the current of Ellice’s blood. It was not the common fear of any woman who sees danger, however timid—there was a hysterical quality in this that horrified her hearer with a vague presentiment. At the same moment she saw the cause of the cry. The stablemen had unfastened the rope by which the bull was tethered by his nose to a ring above the manger, and before they could lead him out the brute had tossed his head free and swinging short round charged into the yard through the opened barrier of his stall. He was coming straight down upon the two girls, the senseless shouts and

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pursuit of the men driving him that way instead of back as they intended, but his rush was stopped for an instant by his perceiving a heap of sacking in his way. The pause was terrible enough in its significance to Ellice, for lowering his big head he rushed upon it and tossed it aside with his short horns—an illustration of the fate that might be theirs next. She measured the space between her and the gate—between them both and the bull—not knowing that she did so; but it seemed to her an instantaneous movement on her part to seize Lily Scott with all the new strong life in her young arms and fling her somehow through the one way of escape she saw before her. The movement was so violent that as the gate swung to behind her they both stumbled and fell, while she still heard in imagination the onward rush of those charging feet, and fancied the great neck and shoulders above her, the little red eyes, the wicked worrying motion of the lowered crest as the horns caught her side. . . .

For a moment the world swung round beneath her. Then she had staggered to her feet and was feeling that the gate was fast, while across her dazed sight she saw three men hanging to a rope which they had regained, and a big brown blurr still galloping half savagely, half playfully, about the yard. She stood clinging to the gate as if alone thereby to regain her senses and her balance, and it was some minutes before she felt her strength coming back to her and recognised what had happened. But Lily Scott did not stir.

She lay just where she had fallen when Ellice dragged them both through the gates, her body half turned on its side, her face almost hidden in the dust of the bare space which many hoofs had worn in the grass. Something in the huddled figure seemed to strike through all Ellice's dizziness; she stood staring down at it, once it caught her gaze, without attempting to help or to see what was the matter, until one of the men,

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having mastered and restalled the bull, came running up to the gate.

“Yo’ hurt, Missus?”

“No!” said Ellice, never raising her eyes from Lily Scott, but moving between her prostrate body and the man. “Miss Scott has fainted. Go up to the house and fetch a mattress—a sheet—anything in which you could carry her up.”

He scrambled easily over the gate, and dropping clear of the unconscious woman ran off at bidding. Ellice stood watching his shambling figure lurching up the slope with a look of sick fear in her eyes until it disappeared. Then, reluctantly, she turned and bent over Lily Scott, a shudder shaking her from head to foot as she touched the inert body.

She was not dead—her heart beat under Ellice’s hand, and it was obvious that she had only swooned. All efforts to revive her, however, were hopeless out in the full heat of the sunshine, and with no appliances at hand. Perhaps Ellice felt this, for she attempted none. There was not even a collar to loosen, for Lily wore no collar, and when Ellice put her hand on the unconscious girl’s heart she certified herself of what she had already suspected—that Lily was wearing no corsets. It seemed an hour before the stableman appeared again with two of the women servants and an old hammock, and with the aid of the other men Lily Scott was somehow lifted into it, her dead weight an effort even to the men, and carried up to her own room. On the ground floor of the house indeed the bearers had hesitated and looked at Ellice as if they expected her to indicate one of the bedrooms—her own, or Mr. Pryce’s—but she motioned to the stairs.

“Lay her on her own bed,” she said in the unnatural tone in which she had spoken throughout. “And then you can all go away—I will see to her.”

She turned even the women servants unceremoniously out of

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the place, and, laying her patient flat, used such remedies as were at hand—cold water, open windows—a fan. But they were quite sufficient, as she expected. Lily was already coming round when the servants left the room, asking questions of the stablemen as they went, ejaculating, commenting, with the excitement of their race. Some echo of their retreating voices probably reached Lily's stunned senses, for she struggled to a sitting posture and stared round her with wild eyes.

"Where am I?" she said, and the shrill tones made Ellice's heart shake again with the same sensation as that shriek when the bull charged. The hysterical quality seemed to run on in her voice when she suddenly put her hand to her side and gave a faint cry.

Ellice stood by the bedside, looking down on her. She saw that Lily had put on an old gown that she had not worn for months, and the scanty folds outlined her recumbent form as they had done when she was lying outside in the yard. Of late the housekeeper had been wearing new muslin gowns bought that year, and modelled by herself with the gathered fullness of the prevailing fashion. . . . Was that why no one had noticed? . . . Her eyes met those of her patient before she spoke in measured sentences.

"You were frightened—we were both nearly charged—by the bull. You fainted. You had better lie down again, I think."

They were still looking in each other's eyes. Suddenly Lily turned—almost flung herself over—and buried her face in the pillows. Ellice heard the first breaking sobs, and then to her horror the crying began to grow uncontrollable and threatened hysterics. With the one distinct idea in her mind that the girl would do herself harm, she laid her hand on her shoulder with a strong grip.

"Don't do that," she said authoritatively. "Pull yourself together. You mustn't—don't you *know* you mustn't?"

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The crying ceased suddenly, and it seemed as if Lily were holding her breath. Ellice wondered if she were going to shriek again, and braced her nerves for the sound. But she spoke in a muffled tone from the pillows where her face was hidden, instead.

"You—know?"

"Yes—I can see."

"Any one can see—the whole world! They'll have to in a short time! Oh!—"

The long-drawn agony of innumerable women—women who had gone through like tortures since Creation—seemed voiced in the one word. It was no longer Lily Scott, the half-bred housekeeper of Mafoota with blood in her veins and instincts in her temperament to bring her to this; it was all the feminine side of humanity—Black and White, bond and free, the olden mothers of "Quadroons," treated like cattle by the slavers, the inherited weakness and strength of Nature, whose law was on the breeding Earth and in the ever-rising sap. The callous entry of the old account book stood out in letters of fire before Ellice's mental vision.

"Mary Ann Frost. Negress. 30. Creole. First class. *Healthy. Pregnant at present.*"

"Oh, you poor thing! You poor thing!" she cried suddenly under her breath, dropping on her knees beside the bed, and laying one small hand of divine charity upon the heaving breast. "Let me help you—tell me how it happened."

Lily Scott raised her heavy head as incredulous of human kindness, and met the pity in the fair face bent over her with the most womanly expression that Ellice had ever seen in her beautiful face. She looked almost timid, and her voice when she spoke was halting and broken.

"There's nothing to tell you—save that I've played the fool!"

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It's been going on now for two years—I thought I was safe. It's hard to blunder now—”

“Two years—before I came here!”

“Oh, yes—I had a prior claim, you see! But you don't care for him, do you? Say you don't—oh, say you don't! I'm so wretched!”

“*Care* for him!” repeated Ellice blankly, in her utter ignorance of the masculine agency in this horror before her. “Care for—whom?”

Lily's face darkened to sullenness, almost to suspicion. Her beautiful eyes looked up beneath their fringe of lashes with the beauty of a cow or any beast of burden, but without the dignity of humanity that had ennobled her a minute since. She slipped into the Negress again with the arousing of her sexual jealousy.

“Come now, you know well enough! There's only one man here worth giving a thought to! Saunders is a black man and Whitworth's a boy—there's only Jersey. You and he have been thick enough of late! You just made me mad by fooling round the stables with him all night!”

The coarseness of the assertion hardly made Ellice flinch in her amazement. She had not, even in the first shock of discovering Lily's secret, given definite outline to the tragedy, and the revelation of its nearness to her made her gasp. This vague disgrace that she could pity in a general sense had been enacted under the same roof with her—since her arrival as well as before. And then there flashed upon her the remembrance of her dreams of the Negroes burying her in this very room where she stood, and of the steps upon the stairs that had always awakened her—stealthy steps, no longer a vague danger of the night, but suddenly revealed to her mind as Jersey King's. She drew back instinctively, and her blue-grey eyes hardened.

“You did this—under this roof! You and Mr. King!” she

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said below her breath. "How could you think that I could give one thought to such a cur? He was no more to me than the stable boys—but at least I had some sort of respect for him. Now I have none."

The words seemed to sting Lily. She raised her head as if to retort, then suddenly bit her full lip and half buried her face in the pillow again. "You must think as you please!" she said in muffled tones. "He's no worse than others—not so bad. I'm the one to blame."

She seemed to accept this verdict on herself with unconscious cynicism, and Ellice recognised that the world at large would certainly concur in it. She was the one to blame in that she had been at least as human as the man, and when a woman fails to resist she is invariably credited with having tempted. In spite of all the sordid horror of the situation to Ellice, a great rush of pity swept over her for the resignation of Lily's tone, and her acceptance of what seemed harsh judgment on her sex.

"It is unfair!" she cried out, bitter with this sudden experience. "But even God is always unfair to women—unless He ensures them His Heaven by allowing them their Hell on Earth. I don't know—I don't know! Certainly, as justice is never finally thwarted it follows that the man, who goes scot free here, finds his Hell—after death!"

But the shuddering picture of woman in visible Hell before her, lifted a drawn face by no means suggestive of Heaven, and spoke with a generosity as great as God's.

"I don't want Jersey to go to Hell, anyway!" she said, and the words were all White, for the passionate stain of colour in her might have made her wish otherwise, driven as she was by jealousy. "If you wish it, you never cared for him!" she added simply.

"I never did care for him—never could! I can't think why

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you fancied so," said Ellice impatiently. "He is less to me than the cattle—far less than you, you poor thing!" She laid her hand again kindly on the half-turned shoulder and kept it with a reassuring pressure. "Does Uncle Dick—guess?" she said after a minute's pause.

"No—I don't think so. He'll know soon enough. Then I shall have to go," said Lily recklessly, but with a hint of grace she added under her breath, "He's been real good to me! I'm sorry—"

"I don't know why he should know—everything," said Ellice, knitting her brows. A sudden idea had come to her, and with it a sense of responsibility and power. She did not explain her thought to Lily Scott, feeling certain of resistance, but Lily seemed hardly to have heeded, and asked no question. She was evidently feeling very ill from her fright and her condition, and accepted Ellice's ministrations with a kind of exhausted relief. It was easy to excuse her from luncheon, and when Ellice told her to lie still she did not attempt to move, and after a little while her regular breathing told that she had fallen asleep.

With light hushed feet Mrs. Hillier moved about the untidy room, setting things in order and arranging for the comfort of her patient the while she matured a plan in her brain. Her championship of the woman prevented her having any hesitation in attacking the man, and the old tenets of her upbringing lingered in her sufficiently to assure her that she was right in bringing him to bay. When her quick ear caught the sound of the men's feet in the house below, and she knew that they had returned to the midday meal, she glanced at Lily to satisfy herself that she was still asleep, and ran down the creaking stairway, avoiding the third step, that was so aggressive, with half-conscious repugnance.

"Miss Scott is not coming, Uncle Dick," she said composedly.

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"She is rather upset—we had a scare in the yard this morning. The bull got loose."

"What the devil!" exclaimed the Penn-keeper, swinging round with a perturbed face just as he was about to take his seat at table. "Were either of you hurt?"

"Oh, no—it only frightened Miss Scott a good deal more than it did me, and she fainted."

"But you, Ellie—sure you weren't touched?"

His anxiety reminded Ellice of the morning's fright, which under the stress of the later impression had almost faded from her mind. She smiled at him reassuringly.

"No, indeed, Uncle Dick! We got out of the gate all right. But it was rather alarming."

"It will be something more than alarming for the black boys before I have done with them!" said the Penn-keeper with an ominous frown. "Who was in the stable this morning?"

"I don't quite remember," said Ellice reluctantly. She was startled at the expression of Dick Pryce's face, and realized that she had never seen him angry before. "No one who was very responsible," she said. "I hardly noticed."

Dick Pryce's mouth shut ominously. He did not ask any more questions, but Ellice felt sorry for the stable boys when she looked at the deepened lines of his clean lips. He was not a nagging master, but she had learned that he never spoke twice, and he was the best feared man on his own Penn. Furthermore, justice was swift and hard at Mafoota.

She was distracted from the probable consequences to the stable boys of their carelessness, however, by her private enterprise, and the intention she had in hand. Beyond a brief enquiry as to Lily Scott's state, on which Ellice hastened to reassure the company, the housekeeper was not mentioned, and the subject apparently dropped, but when the meal was over Dick Pryce picked up his riding whip and strolled out of

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the house with calm deliberation, and Ellice with as settled a mind waited for Jersey King. The bookkeeper usually got away to his duties again as soon as luncheon was eaten, and Ellice followed him into the verandah to intercept his being in the saddle before she could hinder him.

"Mr. King, I want to speak to you!"

He had paused at the steps to tighten his belt, and turned round as if startled, his fair burnt face not a yard from her. It was the first time she had willingly addressed instead of avoiding him since the night in the stable, but she did not think of that—she saw him anew by the light of her discovery anent Lily Scott, and felt as if she could hardly bear to look at him. It seemed a brazen thing in the light of day.

"What is it, Miss Honouram?" he said rather curtly. Perhaps he feared a rebuke for his rough assault of the other night, even at so late a date; anyhow, there was a hint of the defensive in his eye.

"I must speak to you about Miss Scott," said Ellice, hurriedly, her eyes dropping from his, and the words coming crudely in the effort to speak them. "I told Mr. Pryce that she was merely frightened, and not ill. She was ill; she had a terrible shock—"

"Did the bull reach you, then?"

"No!—"

"Well?"

The suspicion in his tone made her task even harder. His face was setting like a mask, and she felt her desperation driving her.

"It was impossible not to see—what was the matter," she said in a lower tone, feeling as if she were the criminal. "When she recovered from her faint she told me . . . at least she acknowledged. . . . I want to know what you are going to do?"

He looked at her half furtively, like a wild animal that may

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either attack or retreat. His young blue eyes were so hard as to make him seem suddenly an older man.

"May I ask what it has to do with you?"

Her heart sank. "In my uncle's house—you must see it can't go on—"

"Oh, I see. You are going to tell Mr. Pryce."

"No, I am not!" she broke in eagerly. "At least I don't want to. I would gladly spare him knowing anything—though we can't help his knowing part of it. But if you will put things straight—"

Again there was a curious expression in his face, half scornful and half defiant. "What do you want me to do?" he said quietly.

"You must marry her—at once—of course!" The training of many generations bred in the solid security of English homesteads spoke in the last two words.

He stood tapping his riding whip against the worn brown boot for a minute before he answered, and then his words seemed to her trivial.

"What has Lily told you?"

"Nothing much—nothing but the bare fact. I do not even know when she will. . . . But you must marry her. You must! Surely you are man enough to undo the harm you have done. You can't be such a scoundrel as to try and desert her? It is an awful thing—it means a woman's whole life wrecked. If you play her false, I will tell Uncle Dick the whole story, and I know he will treat you as you deserve!"

She had spoken fast and desperately, his unresponsive face forcing her to her last threat. She had a helpless feeling in the defiance of his utter silence, and the despair of that figure she had left on the bed seemed communicated to herself. Her eyes flashed their challenge at Jersey, but he startled her by breaking into a shout of mirthless laughter.

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"You are turning champion with a vengeance!" he said jeeringly. "But to very little purpose, let me tell you. You needn't try to bully me, Miss Honouram, or drive me into doing what you think is the right thing—you are very sure of your own judgment, aren't you? Well, it's done already. You needn't worry. We are married."

She looked at him as if she could not take in his meaning. "Married already!" she stammered.

He nodded. "Married—tied up legally—fixed up by a little rat of a parson who was here two years ago. Lily has the lines. They are all right."

"She never told me!"

"I don't suppose she did—I told her to hold her tongue, whatever happened. I wanted to go on here for a bit, and I guessed Mr. Pryce would send us packing if he found what we had done. I meant to start on my own account some day, and then own up. We didn't expect to be caught napping."

But Ellice hardly followed his explanation in her amazement at the dog-like faithfulness of the woman she had despised. To bear a burden of unmerited shame, and to face out the whole degradation in dogged silence, just because the man had enacted a selfish promise, seemed to Ellice a form of heroism. Lily would certainly never have told if she had not attacked Jersey, for had she been going to betray him it would have been in the first agony of humiliation when she recovered from her faint. Ellice looked at him without a word, and found a savage mockery in his face.

"So you see your well-meant efforts to bring me to book are a bit wasted!" he said cynically. "I didn't mean to tell the old man yet, but I shall have to now. Yes, we've been married two years,—I had time to get tired of her tantrums, eh? But you can make your mind easy—we're married right enough. You see there was no other girl nearabouts to hold a candle

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to Lily. Then you came, and—and she grew mad.” His burnt face deepened a little more in colour, and something that in her bewilderment she hardly recognised as jealousy lit up his eyes. “You’re as cold as these stones, I know,” he said, with an angry flick of the whip on the flags of the verandah. “But you can’t help being a woman. You think I insulted you the other night, eh?”

“I think the mistake was mine in going with you to the stable at that hour!”

“Oh, yes,” he said with a rough laugh, glancing at the haughty little head and the averted eyes. “You thought you could trust me to be a gentleman, eh? All the usual cant! Well, I’m damned glad I wasn’t! And if it had been another man not a hundred miles from here it strikes me you wouldn’t have been so shocked!” he added brutally.

She stared at him with a blank scorn that seemed to goad him into plainer speaking. “You put on enough side for the whole Island!” he said. “But you lower the flag when Platt’s busha comes along. You had better reform Arbuthnott rather than me—I’ve married my girl, and I don’t keep Niggers. He’s got a black woman over at New Orleans. Ask him to marry Mattie if you think a man mustn’t live with a woman without a wedding ring!”

The elementary emotion of one male animal towards another where the female is concerned was narrowed down even from jealousy in the loneliness of Mafoota. Jersey King’s covetous feeling towards Ellice could hardly be called jealousy—it was rather the honour of the buck who sees the king of a different herd look towards his own does. The women of the same household should at least have followed him, if only for lack of wider interests, rather than glance aside at a stranger miles away. And the desire to injure Arbuthnott in the girl’s eyes was the savage instinct of the buck to fight for his rights. He

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had no personal spleen with regard to Arbuthnott, save that he was obviously more approved to Ellice than he himself. He turned away with that last taunt, and whistled for the boy with his pony, nor did he even glance to see if his shaft had gone home. The sting of defeat was on him, and his mind was more with the thought of the confession he had to make to Richard Pryce about Lily Scott than with the motionless figure of the girl he left on the verandah. Ellice stood there very quietly watching him ride away in the sunshine, as if nothing had happened, but her eyes were blind, and she did not mentally see the sunny green slope, the flashing glint of water in the valley below, the man and horse jogging into distance. She felt stunned, and shrank from the knowledge that she had hardly realised, yet knew that she had had forced upon her. If Jersey King could have known what he had done he would have felt almost satisfied with his revenge.

CHAPTER XII

"Sad before her leaned the boy,
'Goldilocks that I love well,
Happy creature fair and coy,
Think o' me, sweet Amabel.'
Goldilocks she shook apart,
Looked with doubtful, doubtful eyes;
Like a blossom in her heart
Opened out her first surprise."

JEAN INGELow.

"WHAT you tell me makes the other thing more satisfactory," said Dick Pryce, puffing a cloud of tobacco lazily across the little office. It was so small a place that his own loose figure and Arbuthnott's seemed to overwhelm it and leave but little room for the ledgers and writing gear, dustily heaped upon the table and the shelves round the walls. Dick Pryce was not looking at his companion as he spoke, but away from him—out of the open jalousies across the verandah to where, between the outhouses, he had a glimpse of rough common and the belt of cocoanuts that had named this particular section of the estate.

"Yes, your news is more amazing than mine," said Arbuthnott slowly. "The extraordinary thing is that no one got wind of the marriage. In a land where everybody's business is public property because one has so little of one's own, it seems almost impossible."

"It was done when I was in Kingston," explained Pryce. "The last time I was down—and that's two years ago. That parson over at La Rambla did it, and went home soon

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afterwards. If any one knew, it was one or two Niggers who were wise enough to hold their tongues. Lily has her lines all right. I've seen them."

"What are you going to do?"

Pryce shrugged his shoulders. "Send them out to the Hill House. There's no one there but an old man I put in, and the place is all right—only wants patching up a bit."

Arbuthnott laughed grimly. "Miss Scott—Mrs. King, I mean—will find it duller than Mafoota!" he said unsympathisingly. He had never lost the savage feeling with this woman which had left its mark upon her arm for days.

"She's made her bed and she must lie on it," said Dick Pryce, laconically. "Anyhow, she's got her man—and a precious bargain she will find him! But she is infatuated about the boy, and no more to be trusted than a cow who's just calved. I shall send them both off as soon as I can get the house ready—I said I would have no fooling with Lily Scott, and it seems I was too late. But by—I wont have either of those young half-breds a menace to my niece!"

He turned his eyes rather suddenly back to Arbuthnott and saw that the dark, ugly face had stiffened. The busha's voice was at least under control, however.

"It was just the possibility of mischief that made me speak to you. I would sooner face a mad dog than Negro blood warm with jealousy!"

"Just at present there is not much fear—Ellie has turned champion for the girl, and she's grateful. But as long as King is a possible bone of contention I'd rather keep those two apart."

Arbuthnott spoke rather hotly. "Miss Honouram is quite blameless in that direction!"

"Yes, my boy, but it's King I've got to reckon with. Lily's old history now, and his own property. Then there comes

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along another woman who is newer sport, and not so attainable. We're ail hunters at five and twenty, Busha!"

Arbuthnott's pale dark skin flushed a sullen red, and his eyes were anything but kindly. "Are you keeping King on the Penn?" he said.

"Yes, I can't turn him adrift very well, with the girl in this state! He's my own kin, too," Pryce acknowledged simply.

"Supposing he annoys Miss Honouram? She rides alone all over the place—it isn't only in the house that they can meet!"

"Ellie's all right," said Dick Pryce, quietly. "She will take care of that—it's not King by himself that I funk."

Arbuthnott shook himself with a little fierce movement of impatience as he got up. If he had had his own way, Jersey King would no longer have been bookkeeper at Mafoota. In the existing circumstances, he could but watch afield, as he might not at home. He knew, too, that Jersey had his uses for Pryce, who had trained and taught him.

"By the way, how's the cow?" he asked, with rather a strained smile.

"Dissipated beast!" said the Penn-keeper, laughing. "She drank me out of house and home before she took a turn for the better. King began with rum in the first case, but next day I gave her brandy as more suited to an invalid. I thought she was as good as dead and that I might as well try experiments. We hadn't much brandy or whiskey, but she took all we had. Then I went back to rum. I had just had a dozen bottles up from St. Thomas. By Jove! she drank eleven of them before she decided to recover."

"We'll send for you next time we suspect Obeah in our stables!" said Arbuthnott drily. "I should like to see Mr. Platt's face when you ordered rum by the dozen! The price

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of the spirit and the price of the cow would be a nice question of balance, in his mind."

He was still smiling sardonically as he walked through the house and out to the verandah to find his pony: he had ridden over this afternoon to warn Dick Pryce about his housekeeper, as he had decided, but would not stay to the evening meal, though inclination urged him fiercely. As he turned into the verandah his heart was almost before his eyes to herald an approach—it seemed to throb a second earlier than he had actually recognised the white figure and golden head coming towards him. He stopped, blessing fortune, to shake hands, knowing that he should treasure the touch of the small cool fingers on his palm all night.

"Good evening, Miss Honouram."

"Good evening, Mr. Arbuthnott."

The quiet voice startled him even as the averted face did not. She bent her head as she might have done to a stranger, and passed him and went into the house without hurry, but without any suggestion of lingering.

Arbuthnott mounted his pony and rode away with an impassable face, only the poor beast knowing all his mind from the thrust of the heels into its sides, and the grip of his hands upon the rein that wrenched its unwilling head this way and that. He was himself only conscious of misfortune, and could find so little reason for the rebuff he had received that he had a savage desire to seize the girl by her slight shoulders and force an explanation from her. He could indeed have shaken her for hurting him so causelessly, and denying him the poor little pleasure she might so easily have given. He could find no hint of a cause for her manner, and chafed until he should meet her again to see if it were a passing caprice or some more serious mistake. His desire to watch Jersey King, too, gave him an added reason for vigilance, and for the next week he rode afar

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and anear at his work with a private quest behind it. He was rewarded by meeting Ellice three times, always in the morning, in her boyish dress, but never in company with King, and each time she passed him with the same brief courtesy that stung him to desperate question. It almost bewildered him, for hitherto they had been friendly to an extent that meant danger to Arbuthnott, though it left Ellice with cool pulses. She had always seemed to desire his company hitherto rather than not, and to give him at least a frank liking. He could think of nothing to have changed her, unless Dick Pryce had told her of the discovery of Lily setting, Obeah, and his own presence on her verandah seemed to demand an explanation. It might possibly offend his little lady that a man should have the audacity to even look at her window at such illegal hours—he almost liked the aloofness of her disdain, and petted her image in the shrine he had made for it; but he could not think that his offences merited the harsh punishment she meted out, and longed for the chance of challenging her.

Ellice had as a fact acted on impulse in the first instance. The thought of Arbuthnott degraded to a level which she could not contemplate, made him suddenly obnoxious. The men round about her might do these things,—she acknowledged the existence of such relations with the black women, because she needs must—but an individual case thrust upon her notice was intolerable. She dropped the very thought of the man as unclean, henceforth, and when she met him in actual presence she turned aside with a fastidious instinct. There was, also, a secret smart of which she was hardly conscious herself. Ronald Arbuthnott had been the one person—beside Dick Pryce—in her immediate world, whom she had admitted on an equality with herself. She liked him genuinely, without, however, the least guilty tenderness, but she was content with the harmlessness of her own feelings, and to know at the same time

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that he was attracted by her as man to woman. She trusted her own guard that it should go no further, but she knew that she possessed this power over him, and had not shrunk from it as in the case of Jersey King or George Saunders. Now she saw herself dethroned, in her own mind at least, for youth and single-mindedness did not discriminate the complex character of Man, who loves a dozen ways at once, and a dozen women in turn. If Arbuthnott had the ugly connection with a black woman, as Jersey King asserted, she argued, he could not at the same time feel the unspoken devotion to herself which she had half shyly suspected. The absolutely material side of man was, and probably always would be, a sealed book to Ellice Hillier. This "Mattie" who, in her rigid creed, Arbuthnott should regard as his wife, must in some sort be dear to him—therefore she, Ellice, could not even be the unattainable desire that she had tacitly accepted as her place in his life. She was not consciously selfish; she wanted to be first with him, but it did not occur to her as a cruel wish since she had nothing to give in return. In any case she would have regarded an abstract worship of herself as a better thing for Arbuthnott than the hideous fashion of satisfying his home instincts which Mattie represented to her.

For a week or so Ellice was successful in her new reserve. When she met Endeavour's busha in the pastures she carried out her first impulse of aversion and passed without speaking. He did not come to Mafoota, and she was content to leave things as they were had not Fate decided otherwise for her. She rarely rode after the fresh morning hours, but it chanced one day that the morning had been stormy, and as it cleared later on Ellice ordered the stable boys to saddle up for her after tea, and went for a canter without telling any of the household, most of whom were out when she started. It was a very lovely evening, with that sense of the earth having been

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newly washed, which comes after rain in the Tropics, and she went on and on along the road, loth to turn back. The book-keepers would be in the nearest pastures, she thought, and once she made up her mind to go on further she could diverge into Five Corners or Savoy, and if it grew dusk, fall in with them on her way back for companionship. At present the clear blaze of the sinking sun lay warm on the deep valley and the swelling hillside, and made the green as warm as gold and the shadows purple black. Ellice was not afraid of Duppies, and had nearly reached the cross roads where the highways to Anchovy and Endeavour divide, before she reluctantly turned her pony's head and faced a darkening ride home.

It struck her that it would be a shorter cut—for the road wound—to go through the pastures on her right, and emerge again before she reached the bridge, and she turned into Venables, even as she did so becoming aware of another rider beside herself. She could not see very plainly in the fading light, but as she closed the gate between her and the road she looked back and thought she recognised the evil dark face of the owner of Endeavour—Henry Platt. Rather glad that she need not pass him, Ellice cantered her pony across the grass, congratulating herself that the Penn men had not locked the gates. There had been something sinister to her mind in Mr. Platt's figure as he jogged towards her, and—

She drew rein suddenly, startled, for the gate through which she had come had clicked again. She looked back across the well-known field (she was still in Venables) which had suddenly become the loneliest spot on earth, and saw him—the black man—her pursuer. All the inherited instinct of fear for the Negroid race which lurks in white women, all the acquired knowledge she had gained since her arrival at Mafoota, rushed up over Ellice's mind to render her panic-stricken. Platt was near enough to her now to recognise who she must be, though

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from a distance he might have mistaken her for a youth, and she saw to her horror that he reeled slightly in the saddle. To be all alone, far from help of white men, with a drunken Black, was the acme of desperation. He shouted something at her—probably to bid her stop—in a jargon that did not seem anything but Negro language, though as a rule he spoke fairly good English, and with trembling hands she unlatched the second gate, flung herself again into the saddle, and charged through. He was really in pursuit now, for she heard his shout and his galloping pony, and, though she had the start of him and had reached the next gate, her maddened senses told her what she had feared—this one was already locked.

Ellice swerved her pony round with an instinct of flight rather than any settled plan, and raced through the thick grass at the risk of the pony stumbling any moment in the dusk, and coming down upon her. The boundary to the road was a loose stone wall, not two feet high, but too solid for the cattle to knock it down. She forgot to think whether her pony could jump—she was only conscious of the swearing, shouting figure behind—and drove the animal at it with heel and whip. He rose clumsily, blundered, and only recovered himself by a miracle, on the soft grass by the roadside.

Ellice slipped her stirrups and fell out of the saddle, even as she did so becoming aware that her wild leap had nearly charged another approaching horseman, who was riding quietly along the twilit road from the direction of Mafoota.

She had given a cry of dismay she could not repress before she had recognised Arbuthnott, but the instant she did so she forgot the estrangement between them, and sprang forward as he pulled up, clinging to his bridle arm.

“Oh, Mr. Arbuthnott, don’t go on—please stop! I am all alone, and he frightened me, and I can’t find the boys, and you *must* ride with me part of the way home, please!” she

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panted incoherently. Arbuthnott sat as if turned to stone, his face looking with a curious intentness into hers, which was oddly strained and white seen through the half light. Her hands were trembling as she clung to him, and her eyes drove him half mad with their unconscious appeal. He got off his pony without loosening her clasp, and stood close beside her on the soft grass of the roadside, his big protecting presence seeming to envelop her. Over their heads the thick branches of a mango made night about them before it had really reached the open road.

"Tell me who it is—who has frightened you?" he said gently, but the tone of his voice startled her as Dick Pryce's had done when he asked which of the men had loosed the bull.

"Mr. Platt—at least I think so," she stammered. "He rode after me into our pastures—I think he has been drinking. There! listen—he is coming back—"

Across the pasture she had left came the sound of a pony's stumbling feet, retreating to the further gate, as Arbuthnott's trained ears told him. Platt had given up his quarry, and was wisely turning back, even in his muddled condition being aware that it was ill to be found without sufficient reason on the Mafoota property. But Ellice did not realise that, and thought in her overwrought condition that he was still following her. She gripped hold again of the arm she had dropped, and shrank against Arbuthnott, and in the same instant felt his arm close round her like an iron ring. She had had no idea that he was so strong, and the sense comforted and calmed her as nothing else could have done at the moment. For the space of three breaths they stood there, listening to the sounds of Platt and his pony retreating into distance, the night hurrying up round them, and the tense excitement of the situation keeping them still—and for the space of those three breaths Arbuthnott fought for his self-control while he felt the madden-

ing heave of the girl's breast under his hand, for she was panting. He bent his head in the soft darkness and looked at her with eyes that compelled an answer.

"Tell me now, and here, why you have turned away from me lately?" he said.

Ellice moved restlessly, trying to release herself. The question brought her back from the single emotion of fear to the more complex remembrance of their strained relations.

"I can't!" she said briefly. "I am sorry—but I can't explain."

"Yes, you can," he said quietly. "And you will. Is it anything I have done?"

"Yes—"

"Lately?"

"I don't know—I have only heard of it lately. Oh, please don't ask me!"

"I must," he said, almost savagely. "You have no right to treat me like this—don't you know that I—" He broke off with an effort that seemed to wrench him physically. "Look here, I've a confession to make first," he said. "It's just as well we should speak out to each other. I know your secret."

For a minute she did not answer. Then with a voice whose quietness seemed ominous even to herself, she asked, "How?"

"I know that you are bound to another man, anyhow," he said curtly. "At least, I suppose you are. I saw you by chance, one morning when you did not see me—you were in Tom Tidler's Ground, and I was on the hillside above you. You took out that ring you wear round your neck, and looked at it. I did not want to see—God! I would have given five years of my life to have stopped in a fool's Paradise and imagined that you were still free. I have no chance of winning you, but at least I could have dreamed of it. I want to know just one thing—are you married?"

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"Yes!—"

"I supposed so." He gave such a short hard laugh as a man might give who receives sentence of death, and is past feeling.

"Is that all you know?" said Ellice at last, under her breath.

"Yes—I don't want to pry into your secrets—on my honour, I did not mean to play the spy."

"No—I understand." But she drew a deep breath of relief. He still thought her Eleanor, Dick Pryce's niece, though he supposed her concealing her marriage from the Penn-keeper. An unwise desire to justify herself made her speak further.

"My husband deserted me."

"Don't!" he said, sharply. "You are tempting me—"

"Tempting you!"

"Good God! Ellie, don't you know that I love you?" he said hoarsely, the arm that still half held her tightening as if beyond his control. She started back, frightened. It seemed that this danger of being man and woman beset her on all sides. She remembered Jersey King's outburst in the stable, and though she did not feel the shock and shame with Arbuthnott that she had with him, her senses rebelled against a hint of capture. His voice did not stir her, but its hopeless pain and passion made her want to cry, as a child might at a tragedy beyond its comprehension.

"Oh, I hope not—and I don't think you do really!" she said confusedly, some memory of what she had heard floating across her bewildered mind.

"I am afraid I am the best judge of that!" he said grimly. "Look here, was it that you suspected this and resented it, that made you treat me as you have done lately?"

"No!" she answered in a low, shamed voice.

"What was it then?"

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"I heard—a story—some one told me—about the life you lead!"

Even then he did not understand. Mattie's existence seemed such a matter of course to him that he could hardly dream of it touching Ellice.

"The life I lead!" he repeated. "At Endeavour?"

"I don't know where—I suppose it is amongst the Endeavour Negroes."

"Ah!" He caught the drift suddenly, but even now he was incredulous. "My dear little white lady, you are not making me out worse than other men in your mind, are you?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she cried in distress. "What do other men matter? It was *you* I thought different to them!"

Woman's cry from the beginning of Creation! He caught his big moustache between his teeth and hesitated for the first time. It was as difficult to argue as to explain a mathematical problem to a baby. The thing is proven and undeniable, but the undeveloped brain does not credit it more for that.

"You don't understand!" he said blankly. "That doesn't touch my feeling for you at all. It's a thing we all do,—it means nothing. Don't think about it."

"But I must," she retorted. "It is *you* who don't understand. You think it is nothing—and I think it is everything."

He dropped his arm from its encircling nearness to her warm breast, as if half convinced. "Supposing I put an end to it all—I would if you asked me to!" he said tentatively. The little hut amongst the cocoanuts, indeed, seemed repugnant in the vicinity of the slim figure in its boyish riding dress. And the thought of being bidden by her was intoxicating. After her hint at the estrangement between her and her unknown husband he could hardly bear to give up hope—the hope of some sweet subtle link between them at least.

But behold another mystery! The white face seen through

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the dusk flushed rosy with indignation, and she faced him with a new horror.

"*Give it up!*" she repeated. "Throw that poor woman aside, and—and—her trouble?" (She thought of the abandoned figure of Lily Scott, lying on the bed after her swoon. An enthusiast in all things, Ellice had taken the idea of the injured coloured woman to her heart, and championed the whole race through Lily. She did not stop to distinguish degrees of colour, or to remember the state of semi-barbarism amongst the black women at Mafoota as she had seen them. The Black Woman as a toy for the White Man was always as picturesque at least as Jersey King's wife, to her present mind.) "I do not want you to evade your obligations," she said coldly. "To my mind the duty lies in quite another direction."

"My obligations!" he repeated blankly. Then he almost laughed. "My dear child," he said impatiently, "you do not understand, really. You would not suggest my marrying a Negress, would you?"

"I should not suggest anything," said Ellice passively. "My view and yours are obviously totally dissimilar."

He checked an irritated exclamation. "Are you going to live up to your principles by giving me the cold shoulder because I am—I am like any other man?" he asked bitterly. "Do you suppose I am singular? Is there any other man—There! I can't talk of it to you!"

"No!" she said with quiet reserve. "Please do not." Then a little sadly, "I think on all accounts we can't see very much of each other."

"What!" he retorted. "Are you going to punish me for my honesty as well as your impossible theories? I swear to you I won't annoy you in any way! I was carried away—I won't forget again. I will give you my word, if you like, never to speak of my feeling for you—if you will only not turn from

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me! Ah, my dear! you don't know how you can hurt—a man feels your cruel little stabs as you don't mean, even in your woman's way of misusing power! In this great lonely world out here one can't get away from thought of you—you have nearly driven me mad for the last week with treating me like a pariah!"

"I don't want to be unkind," said the girl, hesitating. His pleading moved her to a sense of unhappiness, and yet she still resented the sense of lost allegiance, and that he was no finer than the men whose slips he used as his own excuse. "But I can't get over it," she acknowledged in a lower tone.

He looked at her for a minute, strangely she thought, and suddenly he turned his face away. "Can't you?" was all he said. Then in a different tone—"It is getting very late, Miss Honouram—I think you ought to go home, or Mr. Pryce will be frightened. I will ride back with you, of course. If you will wait a minute I will catch your pony."

She stood still on the grass by the roadside where she had stood throughout, the feeling of unhappiness accentuated to misery, while he walked after her pony, who was grazing contentedly some yards away. She did not know what she had done, but her glance into his face, as he returned to her leading the animal, was almost deprecating. She could hardly see more than the outline of his figure now, for the moon had not risen, and the heavens were clouded: but as she mounted she noticed that he did not attempt to help or touch her, and her heart felt the lonelier. They hardly spoke as they rode home through the darkness, the mysterious world on either hand humming with life that only wakes at night. Unseen things smelt richly, and the sense of throbbing life was even more vivid than by day. Once a spray of orange blossoms brushed Ellice's shoulder and made her start with its fragrance. She thought she had never felt more depressed than during

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that half hour that lay between her and Mafoota House, and when Arbuthnott drew rein at the bridge she held out her hand in silence.

“Good night!” he said. “You will be quite safe now. Can you see your way?”

“Yes!” she answered in subdued tones. “Good night—and thank you!”

He took her hand, leant from the saddle in the darkness, and she felt his moustache brush against the smooth skin, for she wore no riding gloves. The kiss was so gentle as to be the homage of a servant rather than the caress of a lover. Then he turned and rode away into the grave night, and as she cantered up the slope towards the light of the open door she felt her eyes smart with tears.

CHAPTER XIII

“Let us thank the Lord for His bounties all,
For the brave old days of pleasure and pain,
When the world for both of us seemed too small,
Though the love was void and the hate was vain;
Though the world was bitter between us twain,
And the bitter word was kin to the blow,
For her gloss and ripple of rich gold rain;
For her velvet crimson and satin snow—
Though we never shall know the old days again.”

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

BREAKFAST at Endeavour was generally at eleven o'clock, for Mr. Platt lived Jamaican fashion—coffee at six, breakfast at eleven, tea at three, and supper at six again. The meal consisted, as like as not, of salt fish and ackee—a dish rigidly banished from the Mafoota table since Ellice came into authority in the kitchen. But it is the native dainty, and easy of acquirement, which, ten miles from a railway, is a consideration. Mr. Platt liked it, nor did its appearance in its rankest form destroy his appetite. I have tasted salt fish and ackee that was an honour to its creator, and much more palatable than the Lenten penance dish which is supposed to make Ash Wednesday indeed a day of ashes, to say nothing of sackcloth. On the other hand, the Jamaican confection can reach a suggestion of decay and rotting flavour which is enough to drive a European out of the room, and it was usually in this form that it made its appearance at Endeavour. But Arbuthnott had learned many things in the Country which is called Look Behind, and had almost acquired a native palate.

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He gazed dully one evening at Mr. Platt across the salt fish and ackee which he was mechanically swallowing, and observed that the outlines of his employer's head and shoulders were blurred. This is a bad sign, and Arbuthnott mentally decided to rob the cows of a little quinine that was kept for them. Mr. Platt was not loquacious at meals, nor indeed did he find many subjects of conversation with his busha at any time. He looked up on the present occasion to remark that there was a big loading of bananas at Montego Bay, and their own carts must get off early.

"All right," said Arbuthnott with an effort. "D'you want me to go down with them?"

"No," said his employer curtly. "Yo' can't drive bargain—no dam good sending yo' to sell. Go myself!" When not elaborate in his pronunciation of English he almost invariably slipped into the Negro tongue, and was barely intelligible to a less trained ear than Arbuthnott's.

The busha shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "You can't alter the market price," he remarked. "But go yourself by all means. There's enough work for me here with the coffee."

He felt a flaccid relief that Platt did not want him to take the journey on the morrow, his inertness suggesting to himself over again that he had probably got a touch of fever. It was a nuisance, but he did not worry much about it. His mind was absorbed with a more poignant trouble—the ever rankling sore of a man's desire and a woman's denial. He had ridden over to tea at Mafoota—the first time for many weeks—but the seat opposite his had been unoccupied, and Dick Pryce casually remarked that his niece was not coming—she had had letters to write for the mail, and had told the servants to serve her in her room. The savage disappointment in Arbuthnott's heart had been as unavailing and as piteous as a

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child's for a long-hoarded treat. But later, as he was leaving, his keen eyes had discerned a blurr of white across the home pastures, and he had walked over towards his loadstar as once before, and found the same slim figure on the duellist's grave. Ellice was rather fond of this corner when she felt out of tune with her world, or wanted to day-dream. There was a touch of sadness in the association with the nameless man who had fallen under the great cotton-tree on the Montpellier Road and had been carried up here to his grave. The Negroes would not now pass the tree after dark, though probably their fears were merely a general suspicion of "Duppies"; but Ellice never saw the great gaunt trunk—silver white as a dried skeleton—without half fancying that she heard the crash of bullets, and a wonder as to whether the galloping hoofs in her imagination were carrying Heaven of Ramble to safety, while a dead man lay at the foot of the tree. . . . She was seeing it all for the hundredth time as Arbuthnott had joined her that afternoon, one hand lying a little pitifully on the stone as if to touch the dead man through all the dead years that lay between them. She had hardly met the busha since the night when Mr. Platt frightened her, and her grave eyes spoke to him before her quiet lips.

"Why have you come?"

"Because I couldn't keep away."

"You promised not to say that sort of thing——"

"Only if you were kind to me. You are not kind—you stayed away to-day because I was at tea!"

She did not answer, but the silence assented more than words.

"Am I so utterly beyond the pale in your estimation?" he said bitterly. "Do your theories make it impossible even to treat me as you do the rest of the world?"

"You know what I think——"

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"You speak to Saunders and young Whitworth, and to King, and to any chance man who rides in from another Parish!"

She hesitated. "I expected so much more from you! It doesn't seem to matter what they do. I daresay I shall get used to thinking of you on the same level some day—"

His pale dark face flushed as if she had struck him. "That's enough—you hit home when you do hit!" he said roughly. "You shan't have to lower your ideals for me, or to rank me with the beasts that perish! Are you satisfied?"

She looked a little troubled and startled. "Indeed, Mr. Arbuthnott, I know it is none of my business. I would rather not talk to you for a time, that is all. I can't meet you on the old ground, and I want to get used to the new."

"You needn't. You shall make of me what you please—even the maddest thing a white man can be. I believe if you told me to commit suicide I should do it. Sooner that, anyhow, than the look in your eyes when you meet me now! Will you shake hands with me at least?"

He had got the touch he wanted this time—the remembrance of her hand in his that haunted him so long afterwards. He was thinking of it now, in the bare dilapidation of Endeavour, where Platt's animal black face fronted him across the salt fish and ackee. The contrast between his thought and his actual surroundings made him shudder and laugh at the same time. He knew all Ellice's faults, as a younger or less sadly experienced man could not have done; but, strangely enough, her very limitations made her the dearer to him. Her view of life was ridiculous to his broad experience, her tenets and beliefs those of a child. But he would not have abated one impossible ideal of his little white lady, or made her more charitably human. She was, if he could have known it, far less elementary than in the days when she belonged to the

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husband of whom he hated to think, but her life education was even now but beginning.

Arbuthnott rode out to New Orleans, to the little hut among the cocoanuts, that night, but he did not stay. He called the woman Mattie as one might call a dog, and she came to him, broadly smiling. But he only talked to her, plainly and simply to suit her understanding, and made certain arrangements that left her with the grin accentuated and her silly head bobbing conceitedly. Then he turned and rode home, a certain sickness overwhelming him in the reaction of realizing what he had said. He had forgotten to take the quinine as he had intended, but he drank the new rum that Mr. Platt loved, instead, and thanked Heaven when his muddled brain was no longer sensible of the sharp torture of thought.

For the next week or so Arbuthnott tested the qualities of Jamaican rum as a sedative, and, though he was never too drunk to do his work, he was often drugged. He rode about the Penn, a gaunt figure and sallow face, doggedly attending to his business, but shunning the road that led to Mafoota, and turning aside from the least glimpse of its inhabitants. On the day when Mr. Platt went to Montego Bay his busha had ridden over to La Rambla, where lived the Civil Registrar of the district, and posted a notice outside his door; but for the seven clear days that it was there no one read it with more than a passing wonder, or carried the news to any one who knew him. The Registrar was some ten miles off, and Endeavour was isolated. Arbuthnott alone knew what he had done, and drank to forget it. He would have been ashamed to go to Mafoota now, but he meant to go when all things were accomplished. It is fatally easy to get married in Jamaica, where the laws have apparently been made to compete with the illegitimate birthrate. A marriage license costs two and six, and can be used before the Civil Registrar, or by

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the Marriage Officer of the district. The latter is sometimes a clergyman—sometimes not; but if the former, the parties are married by banns and the affair becomes more public. A Justice of the Peace can perform the ceremony failing a clergyman, and every facility is afforded to the black population to legalise their light-hearted connections. But anything involving banns means the corresponding residence in a district of some fifteen days, which had forced Jersey King to deposit an old portmanteau in a room which he engaged for the purpose, and had been dangerously betraying. The Civil Contract, which the Government prefers to recognise, is far the more secret in spite of its notice on the Registrar's door.

The black woman named Mattie was very busy during the week that followed Arbuthnott's conversation with her. It is the best proof of her submission to her owner, the white man, that she implicitly obeyed him, and did not betray her unprecedented advancement to her neighbours. But she tramped many miles to the nearest village where there was a store, and bought a patchwork bedspread for the sum of one shilling, a gay coloured thing made of odd bits and most wonderful for the money. She also overlooked her household gear, and had two iron cooking pots mended—an extravagance so unprecedented that it drew comment from her neighbours.

"Why, Missus, yo' settin' up your house fo' sure. Yo' guine to mawry some nigger dis time?"

"Noa!" said Mattie, and tossed her woolly head with an irrepressible giggle. "Can't a 'spectable black pusson clean up widout yo' cheeky niggers askin' yo'selves to de weddin'?"

"Why, sartinly, Missus. But yo's bound to be de smartest lady roun' about, dat's sartinly so, and de gentlemen dey'll nebber let yo' 'lone!"

"Dey'll learn to take anoder road pretty quick, if dey come hangin' roun' my house, dat's all!" said Mattie assertively.

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"No coloured man wanted in hy-ar—'spects he'd lie aroun' all day, and want me to grow de yams fo' him to eat. I'm better 'lone dan wid a lazy Nigger for a husband—and if I go gettin' mawried it's not every one'll be even axed to de breakfas'!" added Mattie oracularly. She spread the new patchwork covering over the banana trash which was her bedding, and hung the iron pots in a conspicuous position from a beam under the thatch. Mattie had no wardrobe, she hung everything she possessed from the ceiling or on the walls either by means of the beams under the thatch, or on strings fastened to rusty nails and stretched above her head.

When her preparations were completed, she stood back, hands on broad hips, and looked at them.

"'Pears as it couldn't look nicer if it was a Buckra house!" said Mattie.

CHAPTER XIV

"Paris turned upon his bed,
 (*O Troy Town!*)
Turned upon his bed and said,
Sick at heart with the heart's desire—
'Oh, to clasp her golden head!'
 (*O Troy's down,*
 Tall Troy's on fire!)"

D. G. ROSSETTI.

THE acknowledgment of her marriage, and her consequent importance as Mrs. King instead of Miss Scott, acted like a charm on the housekeeper, and with the recuperative power of her Negro ancestors Lily cast dull care behind her, and was as triumphant as she had been abased. It was somewhat bewildering to Ellice. The desperate, sombre woman she had championed had reverted into the reckless, pleasure-loving girl again, and though she was glad for Lily's sake that the reproach upon her was removed, Mrs. Hillier found her in reality far less attractive in the old phase of her character. She had lost sight of the undesirable qualities which had repelled her in Lily during the stress of her trouble, and had seen her only as a woman, appealing to her own womanhood. But the dignity of her approaching motherhood could not alter Lily's innate slovenliness, her barbaric taste in dress, her alien instincts to all that Ellice regarded as necessary and decent in life. Lily was inclined to vaunt her position and the possession of Jersey as a husband, and to ignore the road by which she had reached that end, and Ellice began to look forward with relief to the day when she should leave Mafoota

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and set up housekeeping at a distance. Furthermore, Lily regarded the friendliness shown her in her trouble as an established thing, and was inclined to demand an increase of intimacy that Ellice was reluctant to grant. She wanted to talk of herself and her new position, and she took it for granted that Ellice should come and stay with her after she and Jersey were settled at Hillside—though the idea of staying in a household of which Lily had complete control filled Ellice with secret dismay.

“It’s a real old Jamaican house,” said Lily, with her new tendency to boast. “Two hundred years’ old, part of it, they say—not nearly as modern as this. Most of Mafoota was burned down in the Slave-riots of ’37, and built up later. Hillside is all wood, and there’s a barbecue on two sides of it—they used to grow pimento up there.”

“Have you any neighbours? You will be some way from here,” said Ellice with cautious interest.

“We are nearer to Endeavour, but the people living the other side of the hills will come in more often, I expect. There are some nice places there. We shan’t be stuck in a hole like we are here. You and I’ll have a good time.”

“I am quite content with Mafoota,” said Ellice quietly.

“Oh, you wait till you see a little more society! Real Jamaicans can keep it up a bit even if they live some miles off! There are plenty of men—the Sopers have five sons, and there’s Willie Hoax at Burnside and Ted Randal at Sink. They’re all larky fellows. I’m sorry Arbuthnott’s out of it—he always liked me!” said Lily, who had appropriated the busha’s visits to herself as a matter of course. “But no one will know him now!”

“Why?” asked Ellice, the one word coming with some difficulty.

“Haven’t you heard? Saunders told us last night—no

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of course, you weren't there. Why don't you come and sit with the boys and me after supper, instead of keeping with the old man?"

"I like to talk to my uncle, thanks, and I see very little of him all day. What were you going to say about Mr. Arbuthnott?"

"He's married that black woman he's been keeping out at New Orleans, beyond Endeavour—really *married* her! And she's a real Nigger!"

Ellice's mouth felt dry and hot. "Will that make people drop him?" she said with faint bitterness. "It seems to me a much better reason for knowing him, now that he has done what is right and fair."

Lily gave a blank laugh. "Why, you're as daft as he! And Jersey says he's been on the drink or he never would have done it. She's a *Nigger*, d'you understand? She lives in a little hut out in the bush, like the poorest of our work-people!"

Ellice's lips closed obstinately. "I can't see that that alters the fact that he ought to marry her—I am very glad that he has done so," she said after a minute. "Besides, there is no necessity for him to live like a Native also, I suppose!"

"Well, he happens to be doing so just now," said Lily, shrugging her shoulders. "At least he is out at New Orleans, sick. He's been on the drink for a week, and got fever, and Mattie is nursing him, I suppose—like as not she's left him, though, frightened."

For the first time a doubt of her own right to act Providence flashed painfully across Ellice's mind. But the sensation was so uncomfortable that she thrust it aside, and entrenched herself anew behind her principles. It was right for Arbuthnott to marry the woman with whom he had lived as his wife—nothing could make right into wrong. Nevertheless, she would relieve her mind by asking Uncle Dick's opinion, and she went in search of him.

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She found the Penn-keeper in the stock-yard, looking with lazy amusement at a brown man trying to sell him a horse. The animal was in bad condition, but Dick Pryce's eye saw that as no disadvantage—it meant a lower price, and a little Guinea grass or some corn. But what was making the bargain an unlikely one to be concluded was the fact that the animal was a chestnut with four white stockings. Now there is a saying in Jamaica—

“One white foot—buy it!
Two white feet—try it!
Three white feet—doubt it!
Four white feet—do without it!”

“No, sonny, it's no good. I don't care for his looks and I don't want him!” said the Penn-keeper good-humouredly, as Ellice slipped her hand into his arm. “Take him over to Endeavour, and offer him to Platt for ten pounds. He loves a bargain, and he won't stop for the stockings!”

The disappointed seller grinned, and led his horse away, Ellice looking a trifle regretfully after him, for she had liked the little lean head, and did not know the test of the white feet.

“Well, Ellie?” the Penn-keeper said gently, looking down into the grave face at his side. Those deep eyes of his under their heavy brows read more in physionomy than the humanity round him would have credited. “What's worrying that yellow head now, little woman? You didn't want me to buy a bad horse, did you?”

“Oh no, Uncle Dick—I thought him rather pretty, but I suppose you know best.”

“What is it, then?”

“I'm rather troubled,” said Ellice, taking a firmer hold of his arm and leading him out of the yard. It was nearly tea-

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time, and they turned by common consent towards the house and the inner hall. "Mrs. King has just told me some news—"

"About poor Arbuthnott?" said the Penn-keeper quietly.

"Yes!"

"He's cut his own throat this time, if there is no mistake about the marriage. I suppose King's story is true, and he was drunk."

"But, Uncle Dick, why should it matter so much? If he married beneath him in England it need not drag him down—he could educate the woman to some extent at least."

"You've never understood the difference between Black and White, honey. You'll learn some day. There's only one way to deal with the Niggers—believe nothing, expect nothing, and treat them like children!"

Ellice suddenly dropped his arm and spoke in a strained tone. "They say that he is ill—down with fever—in this woman's hut. Will she nurse him?"

"I can't say. It would be as well to send a doctor up there, anyway."

Ellice did not ask any more questions. She felt a little sick, and her tea tasted bitter to her palate. Ill with fever, in a crazy little hut such as their poorest work-people herded in, with an ignorant black woman who might desert him, and whose nursing in any case would be a remedy worse than the disease—and herself the agency in all this! The horror of what she had done, and for which she began to feel herself in some sort at least responsible, faced Ellice at every turn. She was too troubled to eat, and hardly heard Jersey King's brief remarks to her. The bookkeeper was still resentful in his attitude since her attack about his treatment of Lily, but a reluctant impulse drove him rather to seek Ellice's society than not, partly perhaps with a show of bravado.

The next day brought no counsel to Ellice, who had tossed

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to and fro with her doubts all night. She saw the morning wear away with a divided mind, and could decide nothing but to ask Mr. Pryce if he had done anything with regard to sending a doctor to Arbuthnott. That at least she could urge him to do, and felt it a responsibility laid on her, from the spur of her growing remorse. But unfortunately for Ellice Mr. Pryce did not come to luncheon, being detained at Montpelier where he had gone on business, and as they knew that he could lunch at the Hotel, there was no excuse to wait. It seemed that she was not to get away from the subject in her mind, however, for George Saunders came in late, with news from Endeavour.

"Arbuthnott's awfully bad, I hear," he said. "Platt's been asking Smith, that coloured fellow from Anchovy, to come over and help on the Penn. He seems to look on Arbuthnott as a dead man, and to be engaging another busha already!"

"Best thing for him if he does die, under the circumstances," said Jersey King brutally. "Any one been to see him?"

"Don't think so. It's the Parson's business."

"He'll have to ask leave of Mattie, now—Mrs. Arbuthnott, I should say!" said young Whitworth, looking up with his bright dark eyes and a flash of white teeth. "My! how she must be coming it over the other Niggers!"

"Arbuthnott must have been a drunken fool to give her a chance like that!" said Lily, from her old place at the end of the table. "It's a pity, too—he was a white man, and his folks were all right, I've heard say."

"Well, if he lives he'll have a lot of snuff and butter babies to add to his family!" said King coarsely. "I hope they'll be pleased at Home!" It is noticeable that the Mustufino is always most scornful of an obvious *mésalliance* between Black and White, and ignores his own pedigree. The Mulatto, George Saunders, was more tolerant.

"Poor devil! Perhaps he's as well off with Mattie to nurse

him as he would be as a bachelor at Endeavour! That is a sepulchre of a place," he said. "But I don't think Arbuthnott will pull through. He was rotten with fever when I last saw him, and muddling himself with rum."

Ellice rose quietly from the table as soon as the meal was over, and went to her room. She changed her white gown for the boyish riding dress, and transformed herself from a slim girl into a slimmer youth, with her gold hair tied by a black ribbon, for she did not wait to plait it. Then she slipped out along the verandah and running across the grass to the stable yard, saddled her pony for herself without mentioning that she was going riding to any one. The day was yet in its full heat as she led the animal down the slope and mounted at the bridge, but she had a long ride before her and started into a canter at once.

She knew the direction in which the hut was where Arbuthnott lay, though she had never actually been there. New Orleans was a district mostly given over to raw bush, but a certain portion of it had been cultivated for bananas by the Negroes who formed a little colony in a dip between the hills. It lay beyond Endeavour and was partly claimed by Mr. Platt, though it really belonged to another property. Ellice kept to the road as long as she was on their own land, for the book-keepers were in the pastures, and she did not want to meet them; but once beyond Dispute and on Boundary Common, she turned aside towards the rising ground and began to ascend the hillside. Her horse was hot with the pace they had come, and she let him walk, looking about her for the track. By and by she struck it—a rough grass-grown way, hardly fit for carts, and certainly very bad for buggies of which few passed that way, the clergyman of the district being the only person likely to attempt to drive out to the scattered remnants of his flock amongst the Negro population. To the left

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of Ellice the steep hill rose abruptly, one tangle of bush and scrub, but on the right the land dropped like a small precipice beside the track, and there in the narrow ravine was rough pasture for such cattle as the Natives possessed, and, as the valley narrowed still more, patches of banana which grew even up and down the steep hillside. She rode cautiously, her pony picking his way for the foothold was rough, and with every turn of the road she seemed to plunge deeper and deeper into the heart of the bush, and to touch raw Jamaica. She set her teeth doggedly, determined not to turn back, but was just wondering if she had missed the way, when round the bend of the hill she came suddenly upon the native settlement of New Orleans, and checked her pony to avoid running over some children loitering in the bush, who stared at her with the beautiful full dark eyes of wild animals.

"Is this New Orleans?" Ellice asked, picking out the biggest, a boy of eight or ten years old.

"Ya-as!" he drawled softly, after an instant's hesitation, as if uncertain whether he would answer or no.

"Is there a woman living here named Mattie?"

The children stared from each other to Ellice but did not reply. She repeated her question more slowly and clearly, and the boy who had first spoken pointed to the smallest of the group—a little child of some two years, dressed in a bright coloured print frock, who hung her head at being drawn attention to in such a public manner. She was obviously a Negro, for the little soft body was quite dusky, but her hair, though dark, was straight instead of woolly, and her features were a European's. Ellice gave a hasty horrified glance at her, and turned back to the boy.

"Where does the baby live?" she asked hoarsely. "With her mother?"

"Ya-as!"

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“Where is that?”

He turned and pointed in the direction in which she was going, and she quietly dismounted and asked him if he would tie up her pony and see that it was safe. The importance of the commission evidently pleased him, as well as the hope of reward; he took the bridle with a lordly grin and ordering his companions out of the way led the pony to a broken tree to which he hitched it skilfully. Ellice saw him sit down beside the animal in contented guardianship, and then walked on along the track which went no further than the little settlement to which it had led her.

At the end of the ragged path was a clearing on the hillside, where the scornful bush had submitted to the planting of bananas and yams, but there was so little distinction between the work of man and nature that it seemed to Ellice as if the few native huts were built absolutely in raw vegetation. She missed the control of stone walls outlining the pastures, and the law and order of the Penns. Through a tangle of greenery she saw a deep cup of land like a miniature crater, full of waving banana, and sounds of life came up from the plantation in the soft Negro voices calling to each other, though the owners were unseen.

Immediately in front of her, where the boys had pointed, was a group of cocoanut palms surrounding a little hut. It was of the most primitive type, with walls of bamboo and thatched with cane bands—not of the ambitious pattern which the more well-to-do Blacks effect, with jalousies in the window slits, and a real door. There was a doorstep to this hut, but nothing to close the open entry, for if there had once been one it had long since fallen into disuse; and there was a window frame, or rather a square aperture cut into the bamboo, but neither curtain nor shutter. The flooring projected beyond the walls in irregular lengths of planking, and these formed an open-air

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sideboard where some one had placed an unwashed cup and saucer, an empty tin, and a black bottle. Detached from the hut was the kitchen—a mere lean-to consisting of upright poles and thatched with banana trash. Some wood ash and burning sticks lay on the bare earth which formed the floor, and a big slovenly woman squatted beside it peeling yams and tossing them into an earthenware bowl—the yobba of all Negro culinary. Ellice glanced at her for a moment, supposing her to be the servant (or a neighbour come to help, if Arbuthnott had no servant) and noticed the slatternly print dress partly unfastened over the abundant figure, and the broad, stupid Negro face, half good-humoured and half savage. It was a sunless afternoon, and over the whole scene hung the soft grey sky that was full of rain, the sadness of the green world robbed of sunshine seeming the very colour of silence. There was no wind, and the smoke from the woman's fire rose straight, in blue lines, accentuating the quiet.

Ellice gasped a little as in the electric hush before the storm, as she stepped over the threshold, and looked round her. There was only one room in reality, but it was roughly partitioned to divide the avocations of the day from those of the night, the stale odour of the whole place filling her with an aching pity for the man who was stricken with illness in such confinement. From the beams under the thatch hung two iron pots, a metal mug, and an iron ladle. There was a rough bench against the wall, and standing on it another large yobba half full of foul water, while beneath were more black bottles. From some nails driven into the wall hung a familiar stained jacket and old riding breeches, and then Ellice stepped past the partition and looked towards the dimmest corner of the hut where there was a bed made of banana trash and what looked like a heap of bright coloured rags.

Arbuthnott was lying on his back, his unshaven face up-

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turned to the dingy roof with closed eyes. The strong-featured face looked dead already to Ellice, but she walked over to him without faltering and looked more narrowly to see what might be done. He was as far as possible from the window and door in the stuffy place, and his body twitched restlessly, though his face was set like a mask. She drew the patchwork quilt gently over his shoulders, and touched his forehead to feel if there were moisture on the skin. As she did so, she heard a heavy step in the outer room beyond the partition, and turned to see that the big Negress had left the kitchen and followed her in. Her huge figure seemed to fill what little space there was, blocking out the light and air.

"Who you be?" she asked assertively, her dubious glance passing over Ellice's boyish figure and evidently troubled by the bright feminine fall of hair.

"What you want hyar?"

"I heard that Mr. Arbuthnott was sick, and came up to see if you wanted a doctor," said Ellice, her large steady eyes fixed on the broad black face. The tone was neither ingratiating nor offensive—such a non-committal statement as the White can make and which is quite impossible and consequently incomprehensible to the Black.

"I don't want de doctor. I nurse my husband myself. I'm Missus Arbuthnott!" said Mattie grandly, her figure seeming to swell with the words. In spite of her growing hostility to Ellice's presence, a gratified smile forced itself into her face as she proclaimed her claim to be a "Buckra's lady," and twisted the broad gold ring on her left hand.

Ellice drew a slow painful breath; she was trying to force her mind to face the situation and to bear her own punishment, and her impulse was the cowardly one of flight before the horror she had made. But she never moved her cold English eyes from Mattie's face, and the concentrated gaze seemed to

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mesmerise the woman, whose own glance wavered and fell away.

"Mr. Arbuthnott is very ill. If you do not have a doctor and proper attendance he will die," said Ellice in a hard voice. "I am Mr. Pryce's niece—Mr. Pryce of Mafoota—and I will send you up a doctor, but you must attend to what he says."

"Tank yo' kindly, but yo' takin' too much on yo'sel'!" said Mattie impudently. "I'll have no doctors hyar, 'less I want dem, nor girls dress' up as boys neither! I'm Missus Arbuthnott, and I can do as I please with my husband, same as any Buckra lady."

Into the northern eyes so steadily watching her came a flash of light like the forked lightning that kills before the warning thunder. The white woman moved forward swiftly, so that in her surprise the black instinctively retreated beyond the partition, and then her amazement was completed by two slight hands closing on her shoulders with a grip of steel, and finding herself suddenly thrust out backwards over the step of the hut so that the two of them stumbled to the earth outside. Ellice's muscles had strengthened and developed to an extent that the Negress could not conceive in conjunction with her slight figure, but it was the nervous fury of the moment that gave her the irresistible strength. She recovered her balance before the frightened, astonished Mattie, and turned upon her verbally.

"Look here," she said threateningly, "my uncle is a magistrate, and if you dare to try and prevent a doctor seeing Mr. Arbuthnott, and he dies, I will have you indicted for manslaughter and witness against you myself! I am going to send some one to Mafoota now, on my pony, and I shall stay here until he comes back with help. You are already guilty under the law for culpable neglect, and there will be a warrant out against you to-morrow. Your only chance of safety lies in his living!"

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She hardly expected, even as she hurled her desperate assertions, that they would have the effect they did upon Mattie, but she knew the Negro reverence for law and blind belief in litigation of any sort, particularly the less educated among the Natives. Had Mattie lived in a town where she might have picked up a little knowledge, she would have hardly been so easily convinced, even with Ellice's note of authority to impress her; but she came of the most ignorant class, with only an inherited fear of what the authorities could do to her if she transgressed, to guide her. She was bewildered and frightened, too, by Ellice's physical onslaught—as well as the mental one—which seemed to her almost supernatural in conjunction with her apparent weakness. Her figure was puny in comparison with the Negress, who, however, had just felt the irresistible strength that had hurled her out of her own hut. To Ellice's surprise and relief she began to whimper, and turning on her heel shambled off in the direction of the other huts, muttering what she would do, and sometimes raising her voice in vituperation, but always retreating.

Ellice did not trouble about her return, once she was out of sight. The present at least was her own, and hurrying back to where she had left the boy minding her pony, she asked him if he could ride. He was sitting there in contented idleness doing absolutely nothing, but he grinned and nodded at the question.

"Take my pony, then, and go on a message for me. I will give you half a dollar when you return. Do you know Mafoota?"

"Yes!" said the boy, round-eyed with the promised bribe.

"Go there as fast as you can, but don't over-ride the pony. If you lose the way drop the reins on his neck and he will take you there. I want you to tell Mr. Pryce that I am at New

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Orleans, and ask him to come out at once and bring you back with him. Do you understand?"

He grinned again and nodded, but she made him repeat all she had said before she let him mount and ride away, knowing that unless a Negro is taught by mouth he will remember nothing of his errand. She did not trouble to tell Mr. Pryce to bring remedies or a doctor, knowing that when he heard where she was, he would recognise why and the necessity that had taken her there; nor did she tell the boy not to ride her pony back over the long distance which he would have already twice travelled, for when they saw him at Mafoota they would send her a fresh mount. She watched her little messenger depart, and satisfied herself that his boast was true—he could ride safely and well. Then she returned to the hut and sat down on the floor beside the sick man, for there was no other seat. Most native beds consist of a plank fixed to the wall with two legs to support it, but Mattie had not even that. The dry trash which formed the bed was heaped on the floor, and the patchwork quilt covered its deficiencies.

Arbuthnott had begun to mutter. He tossed to and fro, alive with fever, and once he tried to get up, but Ellice's hand upon his shoulder and her voice soothing him seemed to reach his far-off senses, and though the eyes that searched her face were blank he lay back more quietly as if satisfied. She had brought a flask of brandy with her, and looked round the hut for something in which to give it, but could find nothing but the iron ladle, nor was there any water with which to bathe his forehead and moisten his lips. She managed to get some brandy into his mouth, but half of it was spilled, and the despair of the situation gradually filled her with a dull pain almost unendurable. It was her punishment to sit there and watch him suffer, without being able to help him. She realised as the hours went on that had she loved him it might have killed her.

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The muttering was hardly intelligible at first, but by and by he began to speak clearly and rapidly. Sometimes he was back at school in England,—then in the Country which is called Look Behind, with all his hopes and prospects behind him indeed; once, though she did not know it, he gave her the whole scene of Achilles over the trench in good Greek, and once he called her softly—"Ellie!" listening as one who heard an answer very far off. She sat on, undisturbed by Mattie or her allies, staring at her surroundings until the partition, the bench beyond it, the pots hanging from the beams, and the patchwork quilt seemed forever branded on her brain, and she saw them still if she closed her eyes.

As it grew darker she heard the first patter of raindrops, and said "Thank God!" as she rose and took the yobba from the bench. She emptied the dirty water and set it out where the rain would fill it, for in a few moments the gentle dripping became a loud hiss, and then the downpour of the tropical Heavens. Mattie's fire had gone out, but Ellice dashed through the rain into the kitchen and collecting what dry wood she could find, lit it afresh, coaxing it to burn in spite of the damp. There was a box of matches—Arbuthnott's evidently—and some banana trash to help the flame, and by the time the yobba was half full of water she could pour it into one of the iron pots and set it to boil. The pots were so clean that they appeared to have been for ornament rather than use and were in fact the two that Mattie had had mended for her wedding. She had thought it a pity to soil them, and had used a rusty old kettle for her cookery in preference. Ellice boiled her water and left it to cool, and the yobba being full again she carried it into the hut and bathed Arbuthnott's face with her handkerchief. Her reason for boiling the water was that she meant to make another attempt to give him brandy, diluting it with water, and had the white woman's repugnance to using

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rain unpurified. When she went back for the kettle she discovered a metal spoon amongst some other utensils in a corner, and realised that most of Mattie's household necessities were kept in the kitchen rather than the hut. She was more successful in feeding Arbuthnott with the spoon, and sat on patiently, listening to the rain and giving him stimulant as often as he would take it, while she strained her senses for the returning feet of the horses bringing relief to her vigil. The steady hissing outside formed itself into Eleanor's song at last, and mocked her with the eternal refrain—

“Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love!
Wherever the sun shines, the waters flow.
It hurts the snowdrop, it hurts the dove,
God on his throne and man below.

“But sun would not shine nor waters flow,
Snowdrop tremble, nor sweet dove moan,
God be on high, nor man below,
But for love—for love with its hurt alone.

“Thou knowest, O Christ, its hurt and its sorrows,
Did rescue its joy by the might of thy pain.
Lord of all yesterdays, days, and to-morrows,
Help us love on in the hope of thy gain.

“Hurt as it may, love on, love ever:
Love for love's sake, like the Father above,
But for whose brave-hearted Son we had never
Known the sweet hurt of the sorrowful love.”

It seemed to her that she had sat there for hours, and was growing cramped and stiff from her position, when she noticed an increasing lightness in the atmosphere and saw that the clouds were parting and that the moon had risen. The white light came in at the open doorway in a broad shaft of light that

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stretched beyond the partition and touched Arbuthnott's feet, but did not reach his head; she turned to see if it were likely to creep higher and dazzle him, and saw that his face had changed. He was no longer dry with fever, but the alteration had brought a great weakness with it, and her heart contracted with a wild fear lest help should come too late. She bent over him and met his half-closed eyes, wondering if he were conscious, for he seemed as one drifting away from her.

"Do you know me?" she said in a low voice, laying her hand on his hair.

"Is it—Ellie?" answered a whisper. He turned his heavy head, and tried to smile, like a child who wakes from a nightmare to find himself in his own home with the face he loves best near him. "Have you come to me at last?"

He was still but half conscious, for he fancied that he had gained his heart's desire. But all knowledge of his surroundings had passed from him, and he was quite content. She tried to give him more brandy, but he resisted feebly.

"Not that—not more drink!" he said. "Don't ask me—help me not to!"

She realised with despair that he was making a moral struggle to his physical disaster. If she were to save him he must take all the brandy she had brought, and she trusted to Dick Pryce to bring more stimulants.

"Please drink it—because I ask you!" she said desperately. "I wouldn't ask you if it were wrong. But you are ill—"

She lifted his head on her arm and fed him, but it was the position he yielded to—the satisfaction of her support—rather than the stimulant. When he had swallowed it he turned his face a little more towards her, and she had no heart to draw away. She let him rest there, and the very strain of her shoulder under the dead weight was a fierce pleasure. If she could have done something for him to her own harm, she would not

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have felt the bitterness of her contrition so hard, or so she fancied. The moon swung up over the bananas in the valley, and flickered among the crowns of the cocoanuts, and still the two figures had not moved—the gaunt, fever-stricken man resting on the arm of the girl, who looked like a tired youth. Ellice fancied that Arbuthnott had fallen asleep, and was almost dozing herself, when his voice startled her. It was clearer, more imperative than before, and gave her an alarmed sense that she must hasten to do his bidding.

“Ellie! Ellie!” he said. “I have come through *Look Behind!* I am free of it—see! I need not go back!”

She pulled herself together to answer reassuringly. “No—you shall never go back!”

There was a moment’s pause. Then he said gently, “Will you kiss me?”

She flushed with the shock of her surprise, but leaned over him and kissed his forehead. “True to your principles!” he said a little bitterly, and his voice was fainter again. “What man is to have your lips, I wonder? You wouldn’t kiss me mouth to mouth even—now!”

She wondered at the faint triumph in his tone, not realising that to such a man as Ronald Arbuthnott her very prudery was part of his ideal of her—the cold northern reserve that he loved, as he loved the memory of the snows after the heat of this tropical world where he had sinned and paid for his sinning. She was hesitating whether to do as he asked—in a tumult as to whether she ought or ought not—when he spoke again, but in a whisper.

“Draw your hair round me, dear!”

With her free hand she loosened the black ribband and swung the mass of it over him, its warmth and fragrance wrapping him like a cloak, drowning him in gold. He raised his hand in a feeble effort to veil his face in it, but even as he

did so his weight against her shoulder drooped a thought heavier, more lifeless. With that clutch of fear again upon her heart she swept the loose mass of hair from his face, and saw. . . .

An hour later Dick Pryce galloped his dripping pony along the little track that led no further, dropped out of his saddle, and in two strides had reached the open doorway. The moon had passed round to the window, and, falling slantwise into the hut, touched the dead face of the man lying so peacefully beneath the gay patchwork quilt and showed the utter quiescence of the girl sitting by his side. Dick Pryce only glanced once at Arbuthnott to assure himself that help was not wanted there, before he went straight to the girl and lifted her into his strong arms. For a minute he stood so, looking into the face she raised to him, as if the moonlight—or something else—made it strange to him.

“Ellie,” he said tenderly, “have you grown into a woman all at once?”

She looked at him with a little mournful smile that made her dry eyes seem incredible. “I have had time, Uncle Dick,” she said below her breath. “I have sat here a year, I think, since he—died. You came too late—too late! There was only me with him, and I have been the cause of it all.”

“Do you think he wanted any one else, Ellie?”

She shivered slightly in his arms, but all she said was, “It was my fault! I made him marry that woman—and then I drove her away! I couldn’t even leave what I had done—”

Dick Pryce glanced at the corner where the drawn dark face in the moonlight seemed full of a sad triumph. “Poor devil!” he said under his breath. “Ellie, I think you made up to him in part for what you did, and I don’t suppose he would have chosen to have it otherwise. You wouldn’t help him to live,

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but you helped him to die. Come home, honey, you've done all there was to do for him."

As she picked up the hat she had thrown aside on first entering the hut, Ellice saw Dick Pryce stoop and draw the patchwork quilt over the rigid figure from head to heel—Mattie's patchwork, that had not been bought in vain since it came to this use at last. Then they left Arbuthnott, free forever of the Country which is called *Look Behind*.

The Third Year

CHAPTER XV

“Under yonder beech-tree single on the greensward,
Couched with her arms behind her golden head,
Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly,
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade.
Had I the heart to slide an arm beneath her,
Press her parting lips as her waist I gather slow,
Waking in amazement she could not but embrace me;
Then would she hold me and never let me go?”

GEORGE MEREDITH.

“If I were you, I should go back to my wife—it is the best advice I can offer you!” said Mrs. Odell quietly. She was almost always gentle in manner, even when her remarks were of a quality to produce a moral explosion; and indeed she had an admirable nerve, for she could set the match to the train of dynamite by her final word, and look no more disturbed than if she had said it was a fine morning. Even now her auburn head was as lightly drooped over the embroidery on her knee as if that were the object of the moment, rather than the weighted sentence to which she had just given vent. It was the crux of the whole matter—the putting into words of the crisis which had loomed ahead for a long time, and yet the white fingers drew the white thread through the cloth in unmoved monotony.

The man standing in the bow window turned round with a movement that was half fierce and half involuntary. He tried to hide the fact that her words had, even now, taken him by

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surprise, with a sarcastic raising of his brows, but it was a failure compared with Mrs. Odell's perfect composure.

"You seem to forget that you have made that rather impossible!" he said bitterly. "Putting aside the unnecessary advice, the thing would be beyond my power now, even had I wished it myself."

"Why?" said Mrs. Odell, without even raising her eyes from her work. "I see nothing at all to prevent your going back and making friends again. A little explanation and mutual forbearance may be necessary by this time" (he winced at the word "mutual," which suggested another side to the question of his marital estrangement, not in his philosophy), "but she would probably forgive you in a month. A visible husband is so very valuable an asset to a married woman. If she can only produce him on rare occasions it makes her position so much more comfortable!"

"Thank you!" The sarcasm in the quick voice was not even disguised now. "But you seem to forget that this two—nearly three years, is a formidable barrier to the reunion you want to force upon me. Our intimacy is easier to explain to the world at large even, than to—Mrs. Hillier." He frowned a little, and looked almost ill-tempered. There was a nervous quality about this man's good looks that required life to go well with him for their best advantage. At the present moment an untoward memory seemed to be wrying the lines of his face, as if he tasted something bitter.

A faint twilight of a smile played over Mrs. Odell's face for a moment. "I wonder what she said to you in that first letter written after she 'discovered all' as the heroines in melodrama say? It must have been very stringent in its terms! You always resent it so, even in memory!"

"She thought herself a deserted wife, you see—hardly credible from your point of view, is it?" he said with a sneer.

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"But as a rule your sex will not understand that though a woman can only love one man, a man can love many women."

"Can?" said Lynda with raised brows. "My dear Eric, if it comes to capabilities I am afraid women have as many as men. It is only a nicer sense of obligation that makes the difference."

"Have it your own way!" he said, with vague resentment of the tenet, however. "Anyhow, I daresay there might be a portion of the public who would side with my wife, and consider her justified in severing all connection with me!"

"How absurd!" said Mrs. Odell calmly. "Besides, it is so obvious that no one but a raw schoolgirl would have tried to put such a complexion on the matter. An older woman would have made you pay much more dearly, instead of leaving you to do just what you wished at the moment. I think on the whole you owe me a debt of gratitude for rescuing you from such an elementary companion. After three years she must at least be a little older—three years can make a vast difference at that age!" she added thoughtfully.

"At least I should have been in the respectable married position which you say is your present ideal!" he retorted hotly. "By this time Ellice and I would have settled down into good chums, and be spending half our year in England and the other half wandering about the globe like other sensible people. I daresay we might have struck mutual tastes."

Mrs. Odell's genuine laugh of amusement interrupted him. "Oh, my dear Eric, don't deceive yourself! You would have 'settled down' in truly British fashion. Probably you would have lived in a provincial town, and been at home the second Sunday after Trinity, or something of that sort."

"What on earth do you mean?" he exclaimed, exasperated beyond his control. "You are talking utter nonsense!"

Mrs. Odell raised her humourous eyebrows. "Well, I can

never remember the second and third dates in a month for calling. I always think them so like the Church festivals. At all events, I have rescued you from that, and perhaps your wife has outgrown her early traditions in the wilds of Jamaica. It was a big change for her!" she added musingly. "I wonder how it affected her!"

But Eric Hillier was not inclined to abstract speculation about his wife from the woman who had supplanted her. The whole scene was getting on his nerves, and making his blue eyes the colour of finely tempered steel. He stood, square-shouldered and firm upon his feet, after the manner of Englishmen, facing the pretty room in which Mrs. Odell stitched on with unruffled calm. It was such a familiar scene to Eric, and her natural little employment made it so much the fashion of every day, that he found it hard to realise that they were in the midst of a moral earthquake.

"Suppose we put my wife out of the question, and confine ourselves to the issues which concern ourselves," he said, with an effort to regain his self-control. "You must own that your news was an unexpected shock to me. After all this time, to be suddenly thrown aside like an old glove—"

For the first time she seemed stirred, and quickened to contradiction. The white hands ceased to draw the monotonous thread, and she looked straight across the room at him with her curious light eyes. Any one looking into Lynda Odell's eyes might have given a shrewd guess at the supremacy of her head over her heart. She was a cold woman, whose utter control of her passions had served her well in the world's good graces when more generous natures would have failed and been condemned. Her eyes betrayed her—they were a soft light shade of grey, neither blue nor green, and though not shallow were as passionless as a child's. It was just the hope of seeing those eyes alter for once, and for him alone, that had

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kept many a man besides Eric Hillier reluctantly devoted to her long after the first attraction had passed.

"I think you are misrepresenting the situation," she said in clearer tones, and with a shadow of decision that did not alter the gentleness of her manner. "We have been friends since the Simla days when we first met—you may fairly rank as an old friend now! But the claims of friendship are hardly strong enough to interfere with matrimony, are they?"

"There are degrees of friendship—" he stammered, but the protest was a lame one at best, for a reason that stung him.

"They did not interfere in your case, at least!" she said significantly. "And—pardon me!—our friendship has been friendship only, in spite of your wife's misconception, which is so unfortunate!"

He writhed under her quiet touch of torture, and resented it the more because it was true. Not in the Simla days—not once in these last three years during which he had been her intimate friend—*cavalier servant*—confidant—what you please—had she given him more than social laws allowed. There had been plenty of love-making, which she was now pleased to ignore, but her cleverness had always kept it within limits; and always he had waited and hoped for a relation with her which she had never accorded him. It filled him with a kind of rage that it should have been so; he felt he had been fooled, and was slightly ridiculous. Three years of servitude, though his bonds were silken, to gain—nothing! He had never put his object definitely into words, even to himself—such things grow coarse if definite, and Eric was, if anything, fastidious in his appetites—far less had he asked the final favour of Lynda. There was an intangible barrier about her mentally that had always checked him. Nevertheless, he had regarded it as a tacit knowledge between them that there was a reward for which he served. And now—

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"Now," she said, putting his thoughts into words, "I find it desirable to marry again. An ownerless woman with any good looks, whose hair has not turned grey at forty, is always put down as an adventuress by the world at large. There is nothing so disreputable as brown hair at that age, unless one has a husband to countenance it! I don't know why, but it is so."

He did not answer, save by a backward swing into the window recess again that turned his face from the room and out to the sunny square. The projection of the window gave him a glimpse of the Front, and the Brighton sea dancing gaily in the sunshine; but he looked at it without seeing its blue and gold. Mrs. Odell glanced across the room and only saw his square shoulders and flat back, and the well-shaped fair head. First she smiled, and then she sighed. Many women had sighed over Eric Hillier, and she was not quite invulnerable. . . .

"Mr. Remington has money—and both you and I know the value of money," she said in her ordinary conversational tones. "Then, though he is an American, he has some social position. He is not a young man, but his advantages are even greater than his years. I have accepted him."

Eric did not answer. He was standing with his hands clasped behind his back in a favourite attitude of his. It was so characteristic that it made her sigh again as one sighs over a pleasant memory—and he was to be no more to her from this time forth. She was no fool, and she knew that she was deliberately giving up her power over one man for the material advantages offered her by another. For a minute it seemed to her a dull world. Then she began to draw the needle in and out the linen again with the old persistence.

"Tell me about your wife," she said quietly, and her cool attack upon a subject hitherto ignored between them accen-

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tuated their changed relations more than any other she could have chosen. "What was she like?"

"I showed you a photo of her once. I have no late likeness, in my mind or elsewhere."

"I remember," said Mrs. Odell, comprehensively. "Or rather, I do not remember, which is more significant. Her face did not linger in my memory, either. I believe it had no shape in it, and she wore a *decolleté* gown."

The suggestion of the adjective fretted him as applied to his feminine belongings, however distant in time and memory. "I do not think so," he returned resentfully. "Your expressions are rather extreme. I fancy the gown had no collar to it, which I advised—"

"Yes, she *had* rather a pretty throat!" remarked Mrs. Odell musingly.

He flushed to the angry blue of his eyes. "You lower yourself and your sex by petty jealousy," he stormed, the irritation of the past hour breaking out suddenly. "You are always hinting of late that I admire other women, and yet now it is you who are going to marry Remington, while I have not even wavered in my allegiance, until—"

"Please, don't be melodramatic! I am not at all jealous and I do not hint. If I had thought that you were 'waving in your allegiance' (Heavens! I see Lewis Waller at the footlights as you speak!) I should have found other means of retort. I certainly should not have been so crude as to tell you of it."

He thought of another woman who had been crude enough to tell him of it—of an outraged, childish letter, ludicrously immature, which, as Lynda had said, made him angry even now—and he recognised that she was right. Ellice knew no weapons save the useless ones of accusation and plain speaking. Lynda would have taken her revenge with all the subtilties of a woman of the world.

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"I wish we could avoid friction at least!" he said heavily.

Mrs. Odell shrugged her shoulders with the slightest betrayal of irritation, but her voice was still as even as ever. "The friction is really all of your own making. I am not even annoyed. As to your wife, poor little soul, I hope you may find something to admire in her, with all my heart. That her face did not impress me was probably due to the fact that at that age she was honestly uninteresting. You must own that you found her so yourself!"

"She had at least the advantage of youth!" said Hillier spitefully, with his knowledge of the forty years which hardly any one would have credited in looking at Mrs. Odell's pale face—a charming face, with characteristics of its own that lent it individuality even amongst prettier women. She wore her light auburn hair parted Madonna-wise, but rippling in a very human fashion over her ears and low forehead, and her features had a quick play of expression that made one watch her involuntarily as one watches the lights and shadows on flowing water. Possibly because of these very advantages, his shaft passed harmlessly by her.

"What is the use of being young if your youth is such a nasty thing?" she said, laughing. "I would not change places with one girl of twenty in a hundred. She is so often lumpy, and though she has a few more years to live than I they will not be of more profit or pleasure to her. To be merely young, without knowing how to make the best of youth, is nothing."

He was looking at her again across the space of room, with frowning brows, and she fancied that he was following what she was saying; but suddenly he crossed to her side, and laid his hands upon her shoulders with most unusual force. She looked up, startled, for she had not expected such a movement, and he stooped and kissed her, rapidly, half a dozen times, with the recklessness of a man transgressing, and bound

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to meet with retribution. For a minute she was taken at a disadvantage, with no precedent for such daring. She was almost helpless under his domination, and submitted to his unnatural ardour without a word.

"Lynda," he said hoarsely, "give up this other man, and let me have his place! I'll forget what you have said—what you have nearly done! Let me be something more to you than what I am—otherwise it must be all over between us."

"You don't know what you ask!" she said in a low voice, almost breathlessly.

"I do—I do! I know quite well, and I mean what I say."

He felt her waver, with a surprise even at herself—felt it in the quiver of the shoulders he still grasped, and she looked up as if half fascinated, perhaps enjoying the pretence to herself that she might be swept away, and yield, though all the while a second sense told her to look well and long at a face she would never see again after this hour—the passionate, desperate blue of his eyes, which were curiously set beneath rather prominent temples, the straight fine features, the mouth which was a little too proud for sweetness, even the deep cleft in his chin that she had laughed at as a man's dimple! She held it all anew with her cold eyes for a minute—then she drew a breath like a sob and thrust back her chair and freed herself.

"I will give you no more than I have given," she said distinctly. "It is quite useless asking me. I am going to marry Mr. Remington. If you would rather say good-bye now, I must even consent to that."

The sentences came a little over-clearly, as if hard to say. He dropped his hands from her shoulders, and stood up—she had always thought how well he stood, with a perfect carriage and erectness—and drew his chin back a little with a movement that galled her by its disdain.

"I have said good-bye already," he said quietly. "There is

not even need to shake hands. We can cry quits, on the whole."

A most unusual impulse made her ask unwisely: "Are you going back to your wife?"

"That," he answered, "is not a matter connected with the present moment. I think my future does not concern you much." He turned on his heel, but before he reached the door he paused a minute as if thinking, and came back. There was something rather fine in the grave courtesy that had mastered his temper.

"I hope sincerely that you will be happy," he said. "I could not leave you with a bitter speech—you have been too dear to me for many years. Good-bye, Lynda. But it is really good-bye, you understand."

"I understand," she answered, as gravely as he had spoken, and that was her last word. The next minute he was gone, and the door shutting on him seemed to make her last impression more vivid—the tall, well-built figure, and over-refined face. For Eric's good looks had always been of the ascetic rather than the material order—she never admired beefy men. She looked at the closed door as if she almost saw him there still. Then, with a compressed mouth, she seated herself again and went on with her embroidery. . . .

When Hillier found himself in the Square, outside the familiar door, he lifted the hat he had but just put on and passed his hand over his forehead as if a little bewildered. One cannot live for three years so closely associated with another personality as his with Lynda Odell's, without feeling that some portion of oneself has gone with it when the parting comes. He had put most of his obligations and duties on one side to force his life to run side by side with Lynda's, and it was as if his motive power was suddenly removed—the rudder by which he steered torn from his vessel. As Mr. Babbington

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had said long ago to Ellice, it was one of those fascinations which are undeniable, but seem incredible to onlookers,—and to the actors themselves, perhaps, when the infatuation is over. That use and custom had worn the keen edge of his pleasure in merely listening and looking at Lynda, and had made their intercourse an every-day comfort instead of the precious joy of a festival, did not entirely free him from his chains. When she had voluntarily snapped them he felt his liberty a strange uncomfortable thing, and missed his bondage with a faint resentment that it should be so. In all features of the case indeed he felt as if Fate had treated him badly, and—most galling to the masculine animal—that he had been the fool of his womenkind. He had relinquished his wife without gaining his mistress, and though the animal in him was not keen enough to place the mere substance above the finer shadow, he ground his teeth to think that he cut a sorry figure in the eyes of both.

He could not, as he told Lynda, reclaim his wife after he had tacitly let her go. Her letter, childish though it was in a way, had made him far more furiously angry than the subtler revenge of an older woman would have done. What he could not forgive Ellice was that she had found him out, for the breaker of the Devil's commandment suffers the punishment of humiliation to add to the other penalties of his crime. All the rest of the Decalogue has a certain seriousness attached to its infringement; there is dignity as well as horror in murder, and in theft, but Satan is never more a Devil than in rendering his lawbreakers ridiculous. Eric's attitude with regard to his very young wife had been one of subtle superiority, in all ways; he chafed at the reversal of the order of their relations which he had caused by his own act.

And now, what was he to do? He walked moodily along the brilliant Front, the stretch of March sea rioting in sunshine

to his right, the big houses with their brazen fronts to his left. He was staying at the Grand in preference to the Metropole, being less likely to know people there who would comment on his comings and goings to and from the house in Bedford Square which Lynda had taken for a few weeks. He could hardly realise that the pretty rooms were closed to him; it had become part of his life to frequent the flats and furnished houses which she always contrived to endow with her atmosphere, and to make desirable. It had been very pleasant to drop in when he pleased at Albert Gate in London, at Bedford Square in Brighton, at the apartment in Paris, at a certain cottage on the river, and a villa at Nice. He had been practically master of the house without responsibility, though also without certain rights of way. Now he was in the position of a grass widower, quite free to go anywhere in the world he pleased, and without the slightest inclination.

The Front seemed a desert that day, though it was crowded with people; Eric walked aimlessly towards Kemp Town without seeing the passing faces or feeling the crisp wind that had more than a suggestion of frost in it. He was going over, in fancy, the time when he first met Lynda again after losing sight of her for six years, at the Constant Spring Hotel in Jamaica—lawless, limitless summer days, with the loveliest scenery in the world for a background, and “the first flush of the Tropics in his blood.” Ellice’s letter had been the only cloud that appeared on the horizon, but he resented it even more now in memory than he had done then, when it had been but a passing sting lost in the intoxication of his glamour. So long as he had Lynda he did not at the moment care what steps Ellice took, and her removal from his immediate present was really a relief to him at the time. He had let her go, only satisfying himself through a reliable agency that she had really reached her destination and was safe and sheltered. He knew

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also, though Ellice had no idea of supervision, that she had remained at Mafoota, and it now occurred to him how easy it was for him to confront her at his own pleasure, while for her she did not know if he were in one quarter of the Globe or another. To be strictly honest, she had never cared to know, and had seemed perfectly contented to let the dead past bury its dead. His mouth took a rather ugly line at this point of his meditations.

He had had no least intention of returning to Jamaica or seeking his wife when Mrs. Odell suggested it, but now, as he retraced in memory the steps that estranged himself and Ellice, he had a savage desire to repay her for some of the disagreeables which she had forced upon him. It had not been a pleasant task, for instance, to present the situation to their mutual relations, and he smiled a little grimly as he thought that it would give him some satisfaction to explain to her that the family, at least, had not laid all the blame upon him—their creed gave them plenty to say of the absent wife!

Supposing he went to Jamaica, and without announcing his advent found out this far-off corner of the Island where Ellice Hillier had been quietly living out her life for these three years, and see what they had made of her? He shuddered a little as he thought of the undeveloped girl he remembered in contrast to the clever, experienced woman whose constant companion he had been during the interim. A lonely spot in the mountains, not even near the civilisation of a town, was hardly likely to have improved the Ellice he had known, in his judgment. If she had been difficult before, she would be impossible now. On the other hand, it would be a relief to leave England just at present, and he might as well go to the West Indies as elsewhere—there was always the excuse of the property, which he had not sold, to take him there. Should he go, or should he not? With an Englishman's votive

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love of chance, he took a coin from his pocket and spun it in the air.

“Heads I go, tails I don’t—heads, by Jove!” he said.

Three days later a gentleman entered a shipping office in St. Mary Axe and booked his passage in their next outward boat—not return, he did not know by what route, or when, he should return.

“And don’t enter my name in your passenger list at present,” he said quietly. “For private reasons I do not wish to be announced in Kingston before my arrival.”

CHAPTER XVI

"Bear me to yonder land once more, where she
Sits throned amidst of magic wealth untold:
Golden her palace, golden all her hair,
Golden her city 'neath a heaven of gold!

So may I see in dreams her tresses fair
Down-falling, as a wave of sunlight rests
On some white cloud, about her shoulder fair."

WILLIAM WATSON.

"I DON'T know how you could manage it," said the Custos thoughtfully. "You see the district is so spread thereabouts, and the Penns are six and seven miles apart. Why not go to Montego Bay or Montpelier? There are hotels there."

"They are too far off, and too civilised. I have a fancy for seeing what the raw life of Jamaica is like—life on an estate, with no interest but the estate. I am not at all sure that I will not put myself to school to Mr. Pryce. You know I have some land in the Island?"

"In St. James's?"

"No—on the east side, in St. Thomas'," said Hillier, lighting a cigar, and turning his face contentedly to the warm night and the fireflies beyond the verandah. Life, as seen from the Custos' well-ordered house, after a good dinner, seemed to him more than bearable in the Tropics. He was glad he had left England just when spring winds and his own parting with Lynda had made things physically and mentally unpleasant, and he did not realize that he had never yet sampled the disadvantages of the "raw life" of which he had spoken so easily. His host looked at him with a covert amusement in his glance,

however. Neither man had dressed, for it was a bachelor establishment, but Eric Hillier's white linen was as immaculate as if he were going to a reception at the King's House. He was, however, always a smart man, and would have appeared so though he had been wearing a flannel shirt and no collar (the severest test that exists, perhaps!), but this the Custos did not know.

"St. Thomas is not a Penn-keeping parish," he remarked casually.

"No, the estate has been given over to sugar for countless years—at a loss, of course. But I have a vague idea that it might be converted with advantage to a Penn, like some of those up here. I meant to sell it three years ago; but there were others involved in the matter, and—and the consent of the other parties was not obtainable at the time."

The Custos shook his head. "I should say keep it to sugar," he advised. "Now that they are starting central factories, even small estates have a chance of paying. I do not think you would succeed with a Penn in St. Thomas!"

"All the same I should like to gain some idea of the thing and the necessary outlay," said Eric with what seemed a pointless tenacity. "Do you know Mr. Richard Pryce?"

"Dick Pryce? Oh, dear, yes—everybody knows him. He is one of my magistrates and a good fellow, too, though a bit eccentric."

"Is he a married man?"

"No, an old bachelor. It would have been better for him if he had had a wife to look after things, from all I hear. He has had some trouble with his bookkeepers lately, and had to send one of them away from Mafoota on account of his housekeeper. I believe they are married, however."

"His housekeeper!" said Eric, slowly, and for a minute his quick, suspicious eyes flashed round on his host a ques-

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tion that that gentleman could not read. "Who is this—housekeeper?"

"A half-cast girl—very handsome, and with inherited instincts that old Pryce ought to have remembered. She was sure to go wrong!" said the Custos with a cynical shrug of his shoulders. "They have no bookkeepers' barracks at Mafoota, as they should, either, but the house is so large that Pryce thought he might as well make use of the empty rooms. There were only himself and his niece and the housekeeper, as well as the boys. Propinquity is madness out here."

"His niece? Who is she?"

"A girl who came out some years ago to live with him because her chest is weak. I have never seen her, but I hear she is quite an acclimatised Jamaican. Rumour says she is more the Penn-keeper than Pryce himself—she manages the stock, and the niggers call her 'Busha,' which means overseer."

Hillier was oddly silent. His lips were a little drawn under the fair moustache, and there was an ugly line between his brows. As a rule he had an air of gay good humour, but like most fair men he was capable of looking very much more angry than if he had been dark.

"What is her name?"

"Honouram, I believe. As I say, I have never seen her. She must have been a thorn in the housekeeper's side—the Mulatto is dangerously jealous. I had a curious case here the other day—a very handsome coloured girl came over to see one of my servants, and I happened to catch sight of her in the yard and noticed her teeth. I asked who she was, and my cook volunteered some unnecessary information about her love affairs. It seems she had been engaged to one man, and had jilted him for another—at least what goes for an engagement here. It was probably a closer connection. Three days after I had seen her the girl was dead."

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“Good Heavens! What——”

“Poison, most probably, given by the rejected suitor under the auspices of Obeah. They know too much of poison, these people. Our botanists and medical men are children compared to them. What made me think of it was that the man was a Mulatto—the same degree of colour as Pryce’s housekeeper, though she chanced to be very much fairer.”

“I know nothing of the term or what it means,” said Hillier, rather mystified. “Except that it is a mixture of Black and White. Are they much darker than Quadroons?”

“My dear fellow, it is two degrees nearer to the pure Negro! Nevertheless, colour plays such strange tricks that a Quadroon might throw back and be as dusky as his forefathers! Racial instincts reappear, too, even under a fair skin. I was on the post-mortem of that poor girl, but we could prove nothing—absolutely nothing. One special feature of the case was that her teeth had turned black, but what the Obeah man had used, or had given the disappointed lover as a philtre, I could not say.”

“It seems rather a good chance for Miss—Honouram that the possibly jealous housekeeper is no longer under the same roof with her!”

“Yes, King and his wife have gone some miles off, on the further side of the Penn. By the way, I wonder if they could take you in at Hillside? You needn’t be afraid of anything dangerous in the food, beyond the drawback of native cooking!” added the Custos laughing.

“The house is on the Mafoota land? It belongs to the Penn?” said Hillier a trifle eagerly. “Do you think they would take me as a boarder?”

“I should think they would be only too thankful! The pay of a bookkeeper is not exactly an income on which to keep a family, though King and his wife, being born to it, probably

scrape along with less discomfort to themselves than if they were used to a daintier civilization. That is the only drawback, Hillier—I am afraid you would find it rather primitive.”

“Oh, I have pigged it in India,” said Eric lightly, and so he thought he had. But the disadvantages with which he had put up in camp, mitigated as far as possible by the almighty dollar, were not the same as those he was to find at Hillside. For a little correspondence and enquiry resulted in his finding himself a “paying guest” under Jersey King’s roof, and in an environment of which he had certainly not dreamed while staying with the Custos. His name had not been mentioned until the matter was settled, so that when Jersey casually mentioned that they had been asked to take a friend of the Custos who wanted to see something of Penn-keeping, Dick Pryce had said, “Rather a heavy charge for your wife with the baby to look after too, eh?” and that was all. Eric and his portmanteaux drove innumerable miles—or so it seemed to him—in the Custos’ buggy, and found themselves deposited finally in a low-roofed, unceiled room, with beams that went into a dark gable over his head, and a bay window thrust out into the tangled greenery of the outside world. Hillside was, as Lily had boasted, an old Jamaican house, but its picturesque appearance was balanced by its inconveniences inside. Eric thought that he had known what heat was in various portions of the globe, but it remained for Hillside to grant him the experience of eating unappetising messes in a badly ventilated oven, where he gently simmered while he wrestled with the mysteries of goat mutton and yam pie. The drawbacks of “roughing it” had hitherto been eased for him by fluent swearing at his native servants if the food were uneatable; but he could not upbraid his hostess, who ranked—in her own estimation at least—with a “Buckra” lady. So his collars grew limper, and fine beads of perspiration hung on the honest

English bronze of his skin, while he swallowed hot fat and musty odours together. Sometimes, as he looked at his hostess with her big blousy figure (maternity had not improved Lily) and the full lines of her face which threatened to melt into her throat, he almost hoped that her own ill viands would cause her to die of apoplexy. They did not seem to deter her hearty appetite, and to his fastidious taste the coarse palate she seemed to have acquired was another proof of her vulgarity.

"I wonder if she could ever have been fairly good-looking?" mused Eric, his deferential manner betraying none of his secret criticism. "Perhaps, if her hair were washed and brushed, and coiled back tightly, and she were braced up and cleaned all over, she might be tolerable!"

Alas for the beauty of Mafoota, and her rapidly diminishing empire! But fortunately for herself a skin as thick morally as physically armoured Lily from any but obvious neglect. She admired Eric more than any man she had ever seen, with the exception, perhaps, of her husband, and she complacently translated his courtesy as the profound admiration for herself that she always took for granted. Eric was a fair man, too, and Lily liked fair men; his hair was by no means as yellow, or his eyes as blue, as Jersey's, and Lily judged by the pictorial-advertisement type; but seeing them side by side she was vaguely aware that the grooming of London had given the stranger something that her husband had not, and she liked his debonnair, sociable manner, and the little attentions which came naturally to him with any woman, however indifferent to his eyes. Jersey had very soon lost all desire to approve himself to Lily Scott, even when he was not openly her husband, and his offhand manner contrasted with Mr. Hillier's, particularly when the latter opened the door for her, or handed her her coffee. She neglected her household more than usual to talk to him, and he had no difficulty in obtaining all the infor-

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mation he wanted, for Lily's love of gossip made him cognisant of all the household at Mafoota in the first twenty-four hours.

"Jersey can teach you as much about Penn-keeping as old Pryce," she said. "He was really busha of the Penn while he was at Mafoota House—the old man doesn't do much. He leaves most of the work to Jersey now," she added grandly, her assertion really not untruthful in her own eyes, for she looked at the situation through her husband's.

"I hear he has a niece who does her best to help him!" said Eric composedly, leaning his shoulder against the open doorway, where he had lingered, glad to get out of the stuffy rooms.

"Oh, she's a crank about the Penn. She rides about in breeches and pretends she understands about the cattle. Jersey doesn't let her do any harm, though—she only fools about the pastures a bit."

"She seems a masculine lady!" said Eric, but he did not wince openly.

"She's a queer girl, but not a bad sort," remarked Lily, with a condescension that would have made Dick Pryce shake with silent laughter. "Ellie Honouram and I are great friends. She often comes over here, but she won't stay because she doesn't like to leave the old man." (A polite figment of Ellie's.) "Since I left there's no one to look after things but her, you see."

A private review of his breakfast, and the state of Mrs. King's present household, induced an appalled sorrow in Eric's mind for the "old man" too affectionately looked after by his niece—Hillier's own wife, and the intimate friend of the overflowing young woman before him. Lily's taste in dress had not abated, but her bright-coloured blouses had a tendency to lose their buttons and strain at the seams to add to their other attractions. As to her skirts, they were always a good four inches shorter in the front than at the back, and her

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placket-hole was never closed during Eric's knowledge of her. He wondered if, to add to her outrageous assumption of breeches, Ellice had become as slipshod as this chosen friend of hers—for he never doubted Lily's assertion. Sometimes he marvelled why he had come, and even more why he did not depart in disgust, during those first hours of introduction to this "rough side" of Jamaican life. Only his grim purpose of seeing how his wife had developed for himself, a certain dogged determination to know the worst, could have prevented his turning his back on it all in disgust.

Outside the pretty porch of Hillside grew a straggling bush of gardenia. Lily was no gardener, though a wilderness half made had been ready to her hand, but the flowers grew raggedly because former owners of Hillside had loved them and cared for them, and the rooms were odorous when the narrow windows were pushed open, though the vegetation made the mosquitos a plague worse than Egypt's. Eric sniffed the sweet scents, and his thoughts wandered from his hostess' aimless gossip, while she still talked on. The warmth of eternal Summer acted on his overstrained nerves like a narcotic, but the rising sap touched him vaguely with its influence, and made him think abstractedly that it would be good to make love, even while he shrugged his shoulders for lack of an object.

"How easy it is to be virtuous when one has no inclination to be otherwise!" he thought. "I shall certainly not find the ideal 'Her' here, either in my hostess or my newly developed wife. Ye gods! What a combination Ellice must have become, with her old bread-and-butter schoolgirlishness and her new loud masculine characteristics!"

"Are you fond of music, Mr. Hillier?" said Lily at this point in his reflections. "I'm so sorry I've no piano. I sing, of course, but I left my piano at Mafoota for Ellie Honouram—she was awfully keen on having it, and it's dull for her without

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me." There was a faint resentment in her tone. She had had a hard fight for it to bring the piano to Hillside; but Dick Pryce had said No, and the simple denial from him meant the accomplished fact of its remaining where it was.

"Does Miss Honouram sing?" asked Eric, a trifle surprised. He did not remember that Ellice had had any such accomplishments, but in truth he had not known very much about her.

"Oh, not much," responded Lily, in a depreciatory tone. "It's just a little weak voice, you know. She doesn't practise much, either—she is out riding nearly all day. Mr. Pryce gave her a horse for a birthday present. Fancy! He offered her a buggy all her own, and the best team at Mafoota, and she wouldn't have it! She said she'd rather have a horse."

The desire of Lily's soul was a buggy—a buggy of her own in which to call on the scattered white population of the district. Then indeed she would feel herself the equal of any of her neighbours. But it was unlikely that Jersey would afford a buggy yet awhile. There were horses to ride, but Lily had never cared for riding even before her child was born. Now it was impossible.

"Ellie's a queer girl," reiterated Lily irrelevantly. "There was a feller on a Penn near who was sweet on her—at least Jersey says so. *I* never thought so! And he died last year, and she's altered somehow—she looks older, and she's graver—"

"I am afraid I am interrupting your household duties," said Eric with his most charming smile. "Isn't that baby crying?"

A miserable little wail had been making itself audible for some minutes, but Lily had placidly ignored it. As she turned away reluctantly to her maternity, Eric's handsome face lost the smile with which he had sweetened his dismissal of her. He did not look angry, but there was a sudden gravity upon him as if faced with a problem. He lit a fresh cigarette, and blew the smoke into the warm, loving air.

"The plot thickens," he remarked half aloud. "Enter the lover, whose existence I might have suspected—though to do him justice he does seem to have had the sense to die before I could make his acquaintance. Now what on earth—"

He stopped short, for his thoughts had suddenly gone back to his own spending of those three years—the love that had been gradually dying so that it now seemed a long-past thing, and yet whose fragrance was sweeter than the gardenias and roses to his memory. Who was he to mock at this possible tragedy in the life of her who was, after all, an unknown personality to him? And yet, so strong is the tradition of marriage from the man's point of view, that he has not yet learned to be just, and feels himself the aggrieved husband at the first hint of another influence in his harem.

"I have not the right to judge her, or him. But—damn!" said Eric Hillier.

CHAPTER XVII

“I turned, and lo
Danaë in her shower! And fit to slay
All a man’s hoarded prudence at a blow;
Gold hair, that streamed away
As round some nymph a sunlit fountain’s flow.”

EDWARD ROLAND SILL.

ELLICE rode out on a morning, unwitting of a heavier destiny than had awaited her in the pastures for three years; and indeed, had she even a presentiment, she might, at the moment, have brushed it aside as lightly as Annacy’s web, strung across her path with silver dew, and dancing a jewel dance in the sun which had not long looked over the hills and called her out. For there are some moods in which man weighs less with us than Nature, and, as she rode fearlessly between clean earth and heaven, nothing mattered to her just then save the riotous blue sky and the fervent sunshine. She unbuttoned her boyish shirt at the neck, and threw it back that the sun might kiss her womanhood—he shot an audacious ray even to the warm division of the breasts, fingering her daintily and making her blood beat as under a caress. Even the thin black cord lay lightly on her neck this morning, and the little gold circle it supported was an empty emblem to her. She had forgotten marriage, and all such experience, save as the blue glasses of life through which she looked at sex; but her pagan lover, the sun, laughed at marital rights, with the old deified treachery of “The best wins!”—Hymen being a less powerful god than Apollo. She was rejoicefully young, and all the world was morning.

She had ridden up through Great Campbell and Little Campbell, where the cattle followed her lazily at a distance to see who she was, and was making her way to Parr's Wood. Dick Pryce had been clearing bush here, and there was a new bridle track that Ellice wanted to see; but before she actually plunged into the wood she noticed a horseman in Hill Pasture, and stopped, thinking that it was Jersey King. At a distance it might well have been the bookkeeper, for one horseman looks very like another when he is nothing but a moving outline; but the instant he got within range of detailed vision Ellice saw that it was not King, though riding down the direct way from Hill-side House. The first definite impression she had was that the man rode well, though he held his pony too much together for a Jamaican, who knows that on a steep descent he should trust to his beast's feet and training rather than his own instinct. The pony—a chestnut, that Ellice did not recognise—was slipping and fretting in consequence of the tightened rein, and the rider was too taken up with the business of getting downhill to see her. There was a right of way from Hill-side Pasture through Lucca into the high road—the very little lane through which Arbuthnott had caught her on the morning when he discovered her looking at her wedding ring. It was divided from the road by a gate which the coloured people called "Shoe-myself Gate" because they stopped here to put on their shoes and stockings on the way to church. Ellice saw that the stranger would take this direction from Hill Pasture, and with indefinite curiosity she rode through the intervening pastures—Peenie and St. Laurence—and into Lucca, her pony standing motionless at the gate to Hill Pasture to allow her to see him pass. He was nearer now—an older man than Jersey King, with hair that was far more English in its fair brown than the bookkeeper's curly golden head, a man with a curious breadth between the blue eyes, and a suggestion

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of breed in every line of the square shoulders and flat back. How well he held himself! How unfamiliar was the little touch of haughty discontent in the handsome face, and yet—

She almost thought that she had given the cry which she bit back between her lips, and wondered if her face were as stiff and colourless as it felt while all the red blood seemed to surge back upon her heart. After three years of security it seemed that the very spectre of her fear had risen out of the ground before her, incarnate. For here was she, motionless, paralysed, sitting at the gate of Hill Pasture as if to await her fate, and not five yards away was Eric Hillier, coming towards her, for he turned aside from the lane as soon as he caught sight of another figure on horseback.

Across the gate which insecurely divided them he called to her in a voice she remembered—a trifle impatient, clear and clean in accent to ears grown hardened to the Jamaican twang—and their eyes met with the impersonal discovery of strangers. Then he spoke.

“Can you tell me if I am on the Mafoota Penn?”

“Yes,” she called back, her own voice quite confident, as one who merely gives information to another. “This is Mafoota. Do you want the house?”

“It belongs to Mr. Pryce, doesn’t it?” he said, after what seemed to her an instant’s hesitation. Did he pause? Did his keen eyes look at her with the dawn of recognition? Was there an almost imperceptible silence? If so he betrayed nothing—neither surprise, annoyance, anger. There was nothing to be read in his *insouciant* good looks but the offhand courtesy of a stranger asking the way.

“Yes, Mr. Richard Pryce,” she answered steadily. “If you ride down the lane you will come to a gate leading into a road—that will take you to Mafoota.”

It was rather like signing one’s own death warrant, she thought

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a little cynically, to give him the direction into her fortress like this. Why should he want Dick Pryce, save to betray the fraud she had practised on him successfully for three years, and to strip her bare of all claim to her present position? And yet she gave him the direction for attaining this probable object, carefully, as if she spoke without her own will.

"I am staying at Hillside—with Mrs. Jersey King," said Hillier briefly. "Her husband has given me all the information he could about the Penn, but I want to see Mr. Pryce himself. Do you know if I am likely to find him at this hour?"

"No, he is out now, looking after stock, I expect," said Ellice calmly. "You would be more likely to find him in the afternoon, and quite certainly in the evening."

"Thanks. Are you his niece?"

"Yes." (The lie came so glibly that she almost thought it truth.)

"I supposed so. Mrs. King told me—" He gave an almost imperceptible glance at the rich fall of golden hair and the mannish riding dress. "If you are riding up through the pastures would you let me come part of the way with you?" he broke off lightly. "I know nothing of the land here, but I am interested in Penn-keeping. The Kings will vouch for my good intentions, but my name is Hillier."

As he spoke she found herself wondering in a bewildered fashion that his voice and manner were not familiar. She seemed to have forgotten that he had a certain lightness in his easy tones that made them almost scoffing. His smile was more satirical than ingratiating also, and he offered the voucher for himself in a "Take it or leave it" fashion that struck her as rather piquant. In the stress of the moment she forgot her personal fear and looked at him anew with childish curiosity, wondering if it were the debonair indifference that had gained him women's favours, or the refined good looks that struck

her the more by contrast to the masculine element in her life of late.

"I am riding through Parr's Wood and Mount Edgecombe, and round by Rutland and so home," she said mechanically. "If you think it would interest you, I shall be very pleased to show you the way."

"I have no doubt it will," he returned with a faintly amused smile. "Though I do not happen to know Parr's Wood or Mount Edgecombe. Do I open this gate and come through to you, or will you join me?"

"You must come to me," she said gravely, and then a curious sense of omen in the action struck her as he deftly swung aside the barrier between them and rode through, up to her side. He did not dismount, and she wondered at his skill in managing his pony and the gate at the same time.

"I have some property in the Island," he remarked as if in explanation. "And I am half inclined to turn it into a Penn—it has been a sugar estate. I am hoping to ask Mr. Pryce's advice; I have an introduction to him from one of the Custos."

"Yes?" she said vaguely, her thoughts going back to the land he mentioned whose disposal had been the fatality to bring them both to Jamaica. It lay in St. Thomas, on the further side of the island, and she just checked herself from displaying an unlooked-for knowledge of its location by telling him that it would probably make poor grazing land in that district.

"This is rich pasturage!" he said, as they turned back through St. Laurence and Peenie.

"Guinea grass," she answered briefly. A sudden discomfort had fallen on her and tied her tongue. Every time his eyes turned towards her she fancied that he looked coldly amused, and her riding breeches began to appear monstrous things instead of a matter of course for comfort. She wished he would not look at her, or that she had plaited her hair and

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twisted it tightly round her head. There was something incongruous in the warmth and mass of her womanly hair and her unmuffled form. Oh for the vague outlines of a habit skirt, which might suggest legs but did not own to them like these dreadful long boots and breeches! Ellice had grown so used to ignoring, though never forgetting, her sex, that to be smartly reminded of it by a new masculine personality was as uncomfortable as a rap over the knuckles. She found herself speaking shortly, in disjointed sentences, and jerking out information at her companion in a horribly gauche fashion. Only once she forgot herself, and then she suffered the humiliation of thinking that he must add savagery to her other unsexual attributes. They had ridden single file through the wood, the outside sunshine only surmised under the cool density of the interlaced boughs, and had emerged into Mount Edgecombe; on the banks of the little stream where Arbuthnott had taken his impromptu bath long since, they came in with a string of banana carts, driving down from scattered holdings on the hills, for there was a ship loading at Montego Bay, and those work-people on Mafoota who owned a little patch of plantation had asked leave to drive over with what fruit they had and dispose of it. The first cart contained only a man and a woman, besides the load of fruit under its covering of trash, and Ellice flung a friendly greeting at them as they lumbered by.

“Going down to the Bay, Isaac?”

“Ya-as, Busha!”

“I hope you’ll get good prices. What is the market now?”

“Half a dollar de straight.”

“Well, that might be worse. Good morning to you!” said Ellice pleasantly, and rode on without any idea that her familiarity with the rough dialect and ways of the district

might seem a little phenomenal to Hillier. He was looking at her with real curiosity, though she did not notice it.

"What was it they said?" he asked. "I find it difficult to understand the real country people."

"I asked the market price of his fruit," she returned in some surprise. "When a fruit boat comes in at Montego Bay the fruit runners—I mean the agents—come up and give notice in the hills that on a certain date the boat will be in harbour, and bananas will be bought at such and such a fixed price."

"What price did that fellow tell you? I could not catch it."

"Half a dollar—two shillings a straight. It might be worse. I have known it down to eighteen-pence, but half-a-crown is a good price."

"And what is a straight?"

"A bunch of bananas of nine hands and over. Anything over nine is still a straight, and will fetch no more, so the growers are not anxious for eleven and twelve-hand bunches. Of course the big growers of the district get the first chance of selling, but the smaller men come in afterwards, and if there is only one ship loading they sometimes return with half the cart-load."

"But it must be a tremendous journey to the Bay!"

"They do not think much of it. Sometimes the men can only load a donkey and have not a cart, and I have even seen them tramping those miles with a single hand on their heads. They are—" She broke off suddenly and called to a second cart that was approaching them in a tone that startled her hearer. It was the voice of authority, and there was anger behind it. He looked to see the cause and beheld a well-filled cart with three struggling, over-driven mules. A banana cart is a rough vehicle at best, and consists of two huge, heavy cart wheels and some uneven planks for sides and bottom.

The mules are harnessed three abreast, the animals on the outside appearing to pull all ways at once through being only yoked by ropes; and on this particular cart there were, besides the driver, two women, a boy, and another man.

“George Roper!” called Ellice, wheeling her pony so that the mules had to be dragged up short and precipitately. “Why are you allowing all those people to ride in the cart as well as the load?”

“Just givin’ dem a lif’ on the road, Busha!” muttered the driver sullenly, with an uneasy glance at the fat lolling figures hanging on the sides and the back of the cart.

“Very well,” said Ellice, in a clear quiet voice that suggested anger much more than if she had stormed, “that is a shilling a head fine for every one of you except Roper and the boy—and I shall tell my uncle of your overdriving your mules, Roper. Samuel Hicks, I know you, and Letty Smith and Tom Scarlett, I know both of you, too. Get down and walk—you ought to be ashamed of yourselves!”

She sat there on her pony, a slight tense figure with a white face and flashing eyes, while the Negroes dropped off the cart like fat snails, and tramped in its wake. It was probable that Roper would pick them up again once safely out of sight, but while the “Busha” was still in the same pasture with them the men and women went afoot.

Hillier was motionless also, until she slowly took up the rein again and rode on. He looked a little mystified, half amazed, half profoundly interested. The girl who rode as a boy and described herself as Mr. Pryce’s niece had forgotten her shyness and him together. She was the Penn-keeper only—a White outraged by the Black’s neglecting an order.

“We fine them for every extra person who rides in a mule cart,” she explained as they rode on together again. “Of course we cannot interfere with any but our own people; but

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the mules are shockingly overloaded and ill-treated, and my uncle makes them pay a shilling a head for all those idlers whom the drivers crowd into the carts. It is generally worse coming home, though the carts are empty. The mules are tired, and I have seen as many as six grown-up people riding behind them. I should like to harness them instead, and drive them up and down hill until they learned what suffering means!" Her red young lips were compressed into a thin line, and she was obviously absorbed in her anger. "I am going to ride across the stream here into Rutland—you can see the house from that pasture," she said, after a minute's silence. "Will you come any further?"

"No, thanks," he answered courteously, raising his hat. "Thank you for your guidance, and your information. I will come and see Mr. Pryce some afternoon or evening. I suppose—" again that inscrutable smile—"he would not take me on as an extra bookkeeper, and let me work under him for the sake of learning?"

Her heart gave a throb of dismay at the mere suggestion. Eric Hillier staying at Mafoota—under the same roof with her! It would be like living on the edge of a precipice.

"I think not," she answered gravely. "Of course I cannot answer for Mr. Pryce. But he would not take even a trained bookkeeper when Mr. King left us. He said two were quite enough for the work, and he dislikes so many men about the place as we have no barracks."

He smiled again, and shrugged his shoulders. "Then I must do the best I can. At least I can ask his advice—"

"I am sure he will give you that!"

"And yours—"

"Mine?"

"Yes, why not? You appear to me the most experienced person I have met. If you would allow me to ride about

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the Penn with you a little, I should learn quite a lot, I feel sure."

"I am afraid it is a very surface knowledge," said Ellice with a sudden reserve. "One needs to have lived all one's life on a Penn, and to have been brought up to the work, to gain real experience."

Suddenly their eyes met, and they looked each other squarely in the face. It was as if two strangers were regarding each other, or, say, two foes before the duel—but the prolonged intent gaze suggested more than the passing interest of strangers. The woman's eyes fell first. She turned away with a sense of secret defeat, and the briefest "Good morning"—but he lingered.

"Then you won't instruct me?"

"I cannot undertake it!"

"May I hope to ride again with you some morning, anyway?"

"Certainly. I shall be very pleased to show you the Penn—if we chance to meet."

"I don't take chances," said Hillier coolly. "Will you meet me and ride with me to-morrow morning, at the same place and hour?"

The indignant blood sprang up to her face, and brought her eyes to his again with a flash in them.

"No!" she said as definitely as he had asked the question. "I do not make appointments to ride with strangers, thank you. Any courtesy I can show you that is the result of chance, I will—but I will not seek it."

She swung her pony round a little fiercely, and splashed into the shallow stream. He sat looking after her for an instant, and his face was fully awake. It answered the challenge of hers with a new sense of mastery, and he even laughed to himself a little as he, too, turned away.

CHAPTER XVIII

"This golden head has wit in it. I live
Again, and a far higher life, near her.

Small flattery! Yet she has that rare gift
To beauty, common sense. I am approved
It is not half so nice as being loved,
And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift?"

GEORGE MEREDITH.

ELlice did not sleep much that night. When she came to think over the unexpected turn that had taken place in her life she found that she was in a worse position than if Hillier had known her, which she was sure that he had not done. The recognition, however, though delayed, was bound to come, once he began making the enquiries of Richard Pryce which she expected, for his explanation of wishing to see the Penn-keeper she regarded as the blind offered to a stranger. He would of course lay the case before Dick Pryce, and then the simple fraud of three years must be instantly unmasked. She blamed herself for her impulse of secrecy, and wished that she had fiercely faced him and demanded his intentions. Anything was better than being in the dark as to when the blow would fall. Besides, had she boldly announced herself she might have attempted to drive a bargain with him, and if he insisted on her telling Mr. Pryce of her identity, she would do it herself. She might at least have made a fight for the one thing she valued, the one thing she dreaded to lose—her place in Dick Pryce's life and his affection for her, blood-kin or no.

It was this that troubled Ellice once the shock of the meeting

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was over, and not the old fear of her husband at all. She had grown more, mentally, in the last year than in the two that had gone before, and she was a woman from the moment that Dick Pryce had found her in the hut with Arbuthnott lying dead. He had looked into her eyes and read the alteration in her; but in the haggard months that followed her development had only slowly been revealed to herself. The remorse and horror of Arbuthnott's death had educated her as no other experience had done. She had found it one unmixed pain; but now, when the intolerable pang had only left her graver and more moulded, she emerged a woman, with the great tolerance and sad wisdom of maturity. All dread of her husband which had beset her in her raw girlhood had left her after the first moment of meeting him, when the habit of fear had attacked her. But with a dull surprise at herself, she found him but a man, and not the bogey he had appeared in fancy; and she was not even anxious as to his power over her, some certainty in herself telling her that the law lay now in her own hands. There was nothing to be afraid of in Eric Hillier as far as her personality and liberty went, more than in George Saunders or any other man. She felt herself quite equal to coping with him. All she feared was his agency in her relations with old Dick Pryce. If she had only accepted his suggestion of meeting him again, she might have told him the truth and challenged him. It had been made, she had no doubt, in an idle desire to amuse himself with a girl who dressed as a boy—she rather scornfully dismissed Eric as the type of man who calls himself a sportsman and looks upon all women as fair game. But it would have suited her own line of action to have consented to the meeting. Now there was nothing for it but to try to contrive it, to waylay him if possible before he met Dick Pryce. She rose even earlier than usual on the morrow, and rode out to the battle as singly minded as a knight of old intent

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on adventure; but the subtle woman in her held out one flag of truce to the encounter—she wore her feminine skirt again in preference to the breeches she had adopted for so many months, and being a woman she convinced herself that she merely did so to avoid his misconception of her character. Certainly she was not depending upon her sex for an advantage in the contest!

Eric Hillier was in a much more satisfactory position as regarded the state of affairs, because he knew exactly what he was going to do, and had known five minutes after he rode up to the gate leading into Lucca and looked into his wife's face. Even the series of surprises which the whole interview had been, had not altered his intention in the main. But he acknowledged to himself that it had been all utterly unlike what he expected. The warmth of the great green world seemed to have developed a new woman out of the colourless girl he remembered, and not having watched the moulding and framing of the three years as Dick Pryce had done, it was almost as startling as if a nipped pale bud of a flower had opened mature with full colour and scent, before his very eyes. Every turn of the head, every line of the face, every glance of the serene, comprehensive eyes, was a revelation, and gave him a comical feeling that he wanted to gasp. The most unreal thing about this new Ellice, however, was her self-possession—the power of her developed individuality. In the first moments of the nervousness he expected, he had recognised the cold little girl he married far better than when she forgot him and suddenly developed an authority—as, for instance, in her attack upon the mule-driver. Trivial as the incident was, it had thrust a gulf between them that left him very much more respectful, and a little piqued. Ellice with a character of her own, and an individual life in which he could have no part, was so unlooked for as to be almost disturbing. It had all

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been totally unlike what Mrs. Jersey King's depreciatory comments had led him to expect—he had imagined a woman dressed in man's clothes for the sake of ease and slovenliness (some reflection of Lily here!) and had found an Imogen—a Joan of Arc—rather, with purpose in the very adoption of shirt and breeches. No doubt the romance of the situation owed something to its staging in a strange land with unknown appurtenances. But he found it piquant rather than the jar to his taste that he had expected; and his roving blue eyes were instinct with a new interest as he rode back to Hillside, thinking.

Eric Hillier thought he knew woman, and on turning the matter over in his mind was moderately sure of what Ellice would do. He expected anyhow to have to make the next move in the game, and that was to compass the acquaintance of Richard Pryce. It was really a game of sorts to Hillier; his fancy was a little caught by the preposterous situation, and the half malicious desire for revenge that had brought him to Jamaica was shelved, for the time at least, in the excitement of an acquaintance with such an undercurrent to it. The mere fact of her defiant lie had compromised Ellice, and put the power into his hands. But he was to discover that his judgment and even his experience could be at fault, and that he must begin to study this one woman at least on fresh lines. He had thrown down the glove in asking her to meet him the day before—she had tacitly ignored to pick it up, by her refusal. He thought that her line of warfare was purely defence, and expected to have to lay siege to Mafoota to find her in her stronghold; but as he neared the place where he had met her, the following morning, he was again surprised to see a waiting figure on horseback, and altered his pace and his view of her capitulation, together.

“Good morning. I am glad you changed your mind, and

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mean to act as guide after all," he said with his gayest smile, as they met. There was a difference in her to-day, a sterner setting of the warm mouth, and a more guarded look in the frank eyes. Eric was quick to notice the compliment of the habit, too, though he vaguely regretted the wild, shy atmosphere it had lost him. She had been more vulnerable as a boy than in this feminine reserve.

"I came to meet you because I want to speak to you," she said with a directness that left him no chance to parry her intention. "I regret that I did not tell you at once yesterday. I am not Eleanor Honouram, as I told you that I was, though every one in the neighbourhood thinks so. I am Ellice Hillier." It was a vague relief that the name had been hers before as well as after her marriage. She was claiming nothing of him. "I need not go into the circumstances that led to my coming here," she added briefly. "You will remember them. Mr. Pryce mistook me for his niece on my arrival, and for three years I have remained here without enlightening him. That is all."

His smile had gone, but his eyes were as much under control as her own while he listened. They faced each other with veiled watchfulness, like combatants before a contest.

"I knew that yesterday!" he said quietly, with a certain *insouciance*.

A flash of resentment broke the calm of her face for a second. His knowledge seemed to give him an unfair advantage.

"What are you going to do?" she asked curtly.

"Nothing."

"What are you here for, then?"

"Business!" he retorted, and his steady gaze defied her to deny the word.

"You are not going to tell Uncle Di—Mr. Pryce, who I am?"

"That is your affair, not mine. If you choose to deceive

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him it is a matter for your own judgment. I shouldn't do it myself. But you know best whether it is for your final profit."

He had not meant to be cruel; certainly he did not know that he found the weak place in her armour, here. But he saw that he drew blood by the rush of red to her face and the hot tears in her eyes.

"Perhaps you hardly understand what it means to stand absolutely alone in the world—absolutely!" she said bitterly. "I was alone when I came here, and I was offered shelter, love, home, a place in the world—everything worth having, if I were only my dead friend. I have not had so much kindness or happiness in my life that I could afford to throw it aside. Mr. Pryce is, I think, the only person who has offered me a great affection worth the taking!"

He was a little shocked—at his own blunder as well as her plain speaking. In the silence of Mafoota, Ellice had learned to say what she meant, straightly, almost without the decency of innuendo. It seemed to her that the moment was real, too, a crisis that forbade any paraphrase, and the strenuous statement was her defence to his accusation.

"Forgive me!" he said, after a minute's pause. "Perhaps I should not have said that. I have no right to judge you."

She did not answer, and he sat and looked at her, wondering a little at her emotion, for her breast heaved still, and her face was flushed as with the warmth of her own tenderness. Through the morning silence the sound of the two ponies cropping the juicy grass was an audible thing, and the vague, sweet stir of the rising sap seemed to touch the man's senses and made him sigh impatiently. He gazed at the ripe face and figure which almost appeared the outcome of the teeming earth, and spoke without premeditation.

"You have altered very much, Ellice!"

"I have grown up," she answered simply.

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“What have you been doing all these three years? Have you been happy?”

“Yes—utterly.” The frank avowal stiffened the barrier between them as no conscious effort could have done, and brought the resentment into his eyes again. However much he may be indifferent to her, the man who has lived with a woman as his wife hardly relishes being told that she was only utterly happy when he left her. “I have been growing and breathing!” she acknowledged with a sudden soft little sigh. The fear of him that had been removed by his assurance of not betraying her had taken her reserve with it. Her face was almost friendly as she turned it to him, and the maddening tenderness of her mouth and eyes made him smart to realize that she was remembering happy days in which he could never have a share.

“Has it been all physical—all mere bodily breathing and growing?” he asked with the jealousy of a spoilt child. It seemed to him that this woman had never belonged to him, but he was suspicious of even her thoughts belonging to some one else. The cloud that shadowed her fair face at his question brought a reflection to his own.

“I have suffered!” she said in a lower tone.

For a moment he looked as if he were going to speak hastily; then he shrugged his broad shoulders with a rather false accentuation of indifference, and smiled, though his eyes were still sombre.

“At least we need not make each other unhappy,” he said carelessly. “Do you think it would be impossible for us to be friends for the short time I am in your neighbourhood? I have told you that I will not interfere with you—suppose we ignore what is better forgotten and start afresh as mere acquaintances?”

She brightened with infinite relief. If he had referred to

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his own share in the pact, and attempted to excuse himself or explain, it would have been a mere embarrassment to her. She did not care for him, and so had nothing to pardon. Remembering but vaguely her outburst of a letter, she felt that perhaps she had spoken too plainly in her immaturity, but at least it had somehow squared matters between them. There seemed to her new broad-mindedness no reason why they should not be friends. He made no claim to her, and her sleeping pulses warned her of no birth of new feeling possible in the future. To her physical eyes he was merely a rather desirable figure as he sat his pony beside her—a man with an air of clean breeding that she had almost forgotten in the Colony. The free, barbarous life made men careless, perhaps, but she privately accorded Eric Hillier an unusual quantity of good looks in comparison to her immediate circle. Across the dews of the new day she held out a little hard brown hand to him.

“There is no reason why we should not be friends!” she said with that serenity that struck him as the most unlooked-for development in her. “There never is, really, any reason why men and women should not know each other without prejudice on either side!”

Perhaps, fresher from a conventional world, he made a reservation with regard to her statement; but he did not say so then. He took the unfamiliar hand as heartily as though she had been a man, but he spoke with a certain mastery.

“Then you will meet me and ride with me, and we will get to know each other as English people should on alien soil. And you are not to pander to what you think my prejudices.”

“How?” she asked, a trifle startled.

He pointed to the habit skirt. “This way. Please dress as you will, and ride as you will, and trust me to admire you all the same!”

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Her eyes following his to the feminine disguise, flashed up again with a half laughing protest—and it was then, even in the unspoken confession of hers, and the homage of his, that the silent Sex they had agreed to ignore was indubitably acknowledged between them.

CHAPTER XIX

"As an aureol sign o' grace
Goldilocks, ah fall and flow,
On the blooming childlike face,
Dimple, dimple come and go.
Give her time; on grass and sky
Let her gaze if she be fain;
As they looked e'er he drew nigh
They will never look again."

JEAN INGELow.

"I'VE a message for you from Mrs. King, Ellie," remarked Mr. Pryce, lighting the big Jamaican cigar that always came at the end of his day. He sighed luxuriously as the smoke from the green tobacco passed through his nostrils, and stretched his limbs like the big Cuban mastiff lying at his feet. The dog was a comparatively recent addition to the household, of which he had only been a member for the past year; in colour he was a rich mahogany, and in size he resembled a small calf. He was firm friends with the Penn-keeper and Ellice, but he tolerated George Saunders and Arnold Whitworth with a dignified reserve, and sniffed suspiciously at Jersey King, who had left Mafoota House before the arrival of a watchdog.

"Well, what's the message, Uncle," asked Ellice, rubbing the mastiff gently with her toe. Roy turned his grand head and licked the little foot fondly. He had long since constituted himself the Lion of this Una.

"There's a hop on at Burnside, over the hills, and they want you to join their party," said Dick Pryce a trifle drily.

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He had been an intensely amused, but silent witness, of Lily's efforts to draw Ellice into her new circle of acquaintance. The usual Penn-keeping type of Jamaican, however, did not recommend itself to "Miss Honouram," who had gently but coldly extricated herself from the free and easy fellowship which prevailed at Hillside.

"Oh, Uncle Dick!" she exclaimed a little dubiously. "I don't think I can. It's—it's such a long way."

"Lily wants you to go over early in the day. Of course they'll put you up—Burnside is six miles further on, and a good twelve from here. They are going to make up a big party, and drive over in buggies."

"Yes," said Ellice with unintentional distaste. "I know—Ted Randal from Sink, and the people from Oldham Hall! And *all* the Soper's men and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts!"

A deep chuckle from Mr. Pryce made her give his arm a little remorseful squeeze. "Uncle, you know I don't mean to give myself airs, but it will be dreadful! A dance at Burnside with Willie Hoax as host is bad enough, and all those people calling each other by their Christian names, and shrieking at the tops of twangy voices! I can bear the women, but I am always afraid that I shall quarrel with the men!"

"Don't you like old Hoax? He's a rough diamond, but he makes his land pay!"

"I like him as a Penn-keeper," said Ellice decidedly. "But I never want him to come out of the pastures! When he was teaching me last year to sow Para grass in swampy land and Guinea grass on higher grounds, I was very interested; but when he comes up here to tea and tells you coarse tales of his neighbours, I hate him!"

"Unfortunately he did not quite understand that your flattering interest stopped short at his Penn—last year!" re-

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marked Dick Pryce in a tone of reminiscence. "A bit rough on him, wasn't it, eh?"

Ellice stooped to pat Roy with a flaming face. "It was so stupid!" she said impatiently. "He took me up a high hill one day, and showed me all his riches. As if Burnside could compare with Mafoota!"

"Ah! he did ask you if you would like to exchange then? I always wondered if it came to the point. Well, if you don't like Jamaicans, there's a change for you, this year."

"Why? Where?" asked Ellice absently. She did not concern herself overmuch with the men of the immediate neighbourhood.

"That fellow who is staying with King—what's his name? Hillier? He's an Englishman, at least."

"Oh!" said Ellice blankly. And then, "Is he going to Burnside?"

"Oh, he's going fast enough. Lily wouldn't leave him behind, you bet. He's the latest feather in her cap. She's going to take him all round the show as her prize."

Ellice did not answer for a moment. Her small restless hand was pulling the mastiff's tawny ears with gentle violence, and she looked away through the awakening night to the dark hills over which the burning rim of a new moon was suddenly coming into view. "I should not have thought that that kind of entertainment would amuse Mr. Hillier," she said rather slowly.

"Why not?"

"He strikes me as an ultra-fastidious man!"

"The ultra-fastidious man before the footlights can be as rowdy as his fellows behind the scenes—generally worse from reaction," said Dick Pryce shrewdly. "Where have you seen him?"

"I have met him several times, riding about the property,"

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said Ellice briefly. "He asked me questions, as he is interested in the Penn. I think he wants to see you, Uncle Dick."

"Rather odd he hasn't managed it yet then!" said Dick Pryce drily. "He's been here two or three weeks. Don't go interfering with Lily's last victim, honey—she is apt to resent it, you know!"

"But she has compassed her heart's desire and married Jersey King now!" said Ellice a trifle resentfully. "She can't want Mr. Hillier, too!"

"Can't she?" said Mr. Pryce with a slight smile lifting the corners of his strong mouth. "A woman of Lily's type can do with a lot of men hanging round. D'you know that when she was jealous she once tried to work Obeah on you?"

"Nonsense, Uncle!"—Ellice was really amazed.

"It didn't come off—never mind how it was stopped. And even if it had, a few balls of earth and feathers would not have hurt you. I should have been much more afraid of a queer taste in your coffee!"

Ellice was thinking. "Uncle Dick, I did come across a piece of paper just about the time Lily was so jealous. I thought it was nonsense, or that the servants had been writing some Nigger gibberish. You never saw such a jumble of words! It was like a recipe—something about cutting your finger and squeezing it in a wineglass and adding nutmeg. I found it amongst those books in the hall."

"The deuce you did!" The Penn-keeper's voice at least sounded startled. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I never thought of it again. It was so absurd!"

"It was probably a love-philtre, and in that case she tried it on King," said Dick Pryce, more as if speaking to himself than to Ellice. "Humph! it looks nasty for Hillier if she sets

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her mind on him. He'll be the victim of an Obeah recipe one of these days."

The moon's disk had risen clear of the hill line, and shone straight into the verandah. It found Ellice with a subtle tangle of emotions expressed in her face, and as if conscious of them she stooped over Roy again and kissed his soft, wrinkled forehead. Dogs, and sometimes even men, are the recipients of more caresses prompted by feelings unstirred by them, than they know.

Ellice had been within the truth when she had said that she had met Hillier two or three times. As a matter of fact she had met him nearly every day since their first encounter. The guarded peace between them had still its air of quiet friendliness and good comradeship, but there may have been other elements in it also since she was not quite frank even with Uncle Dick. There was a certain piquancy in her intercourse with Hillier that had tempted her into continuing it, and up till now she had been conscience-free because she could tell herself that it did not really matter to her whether she met him again or no—a feminine argument that no man would have attempted. Either the vision of Hillier at the Burnside dance was disturbing, however, or Dick Pryce's half satirical warning about Mrs. Jersey King took root in her mind, for next day she abandoned her early ride, and capriciously altered the hour to the later afternoon when there was no tacit agreement to meet at Shoe-myself Gate, or in Lucca. It was possible that a solitary horseman was haunting the pastures nearer Hillside, of course; but Ellice turned her mare's head in an opposite direction, and took what for her was an unusual ride, through the eastern boundaries of the Penn, called the Hundred Acres, on the road to Montpelier. The men were cleaning a pasture called Limit, and cutting the Guinea grass where the cattle had been as she rode through, and she paused awhile

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to look. The great knives swung to and fro with a regular rhythm that was pretty to watch, and the dry tops of the grass clumps left by the cattle fell swiftly. There had been no pasturing here for a few days, for the grass was not allowed to be over-fed at Mafoota, and already the good green Guinea roots were sprouting again,—in another month they would be fit for fodder once more. Ellice sat and watched the men for some minutes, their deliberate-timed action filling her with vague pleasure. Near-by an old woman was cooking over a wood fire by a process which is called in the vernacular “Woman-be-damned!” Two short forks of bamboo were stuck in the earth some three yards apart to support a longer piece of cane from which hung nine or ten pots. In each of these pots, as Ellice knew, was a separate savoury dish for the men, and woe betide the cook if she confused her orders! The name of the process, however, is gained by the tradition that when a black man comes home at night to his wife and finds his supper not ready, he says, “Woman be damned! I’ll do it myself,” and the bamboo and the pots is such an easy method as to render him independent. The old Negress being wife to none of the workers in Limit, was cooking for them with exemplary meekness; what made her proceedings extraordinary was that it was past four o’clock in the afternoon, and the Negro’s one meal is, or should be, at noon.

“What you cooking, Missus?” Ellice asked curiously, riding closer to the fire.

“I just boiling yams, Busha!” she responded apologetically. “De men say work am terrible hard dis time year, and dey want more food!”

Ellice laughed, for the leisurely movements of the men did not suggest hard work. She was wearing her boyish dress to-day, being in no anticipation of a meeting, and the term “Busha” was sweet to her.

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"I beg you not to over-feed them, Missus!" she said gaily. "They work no more for that!" and with a smiling nod at the old woman she passed on, away over the hard road until she was half way to the station, and then short to her right, and up through their own land and on past Roehampton, until she struck the road to the Blue Hole, and was on the Montpelier estate riding between small cultivations of sugar-cane and bananas, on a stony path that she dared not canter, until suddenly there was a group of trees to her left, and through the great trunks she saw the gleam of water, blue-green like a peacock's tail.

Ellice had foregone her tea, and was thirsty. She dismounted, and leaving her horse amongst the brush and scrub by the roadside, she picked her way through the knotted roots of the great cotton-trees overhanging the Hole, and, leaning as far over as she dared, gazed thirstily at the wonderful water. A wild fig had enwrapped the cotton-tree until nothing but its great outline was left, but the branches spread far out and shaded the Hole, so that only daggers of sunlight shot through the foliage at this hour and dappled the surface. How deep it was! How cool and inviting! The pool was thirty feet deep, but so clear that as Ellice supported herself by the trunk of a smaller tree she could lean over and see the sides of the Hole plainly, slab on slab of rock, down to the basin of the spring. But the water was untroubled even by a ripple, save when a tiny fish darted by, and no man has ever dived and found the cave whence the spring rises, and in which the Negroes say the Duppy lives with his golden table. Golden table or not, the Hole is a gem in itself, for the heart of the water is as deep and rich in colour as a precious stone, and where it runs away over the stones, and slips underground to make its way into the valley, it is hardly less vividly blue. Ellice would have drunk fearlessly if she could have found a

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big leaf for a cup and filled it. She was so absorbed in her desire for the water that she noticed no approach, and the first she heard of an intruder was a man's step among the tree roots behind her, and then a man's arm passed strongly round her waist in unsolicited support. She could not see her own or Hillier's reflection in the quiet surface of the Hole, but her instinct seemed to identify him the moment he touched her. In the first breath of her surprise she was taken at a disadvantage, and for twenty seconds at least he held her in that close clasp before he spoke or confirmed her recognition.

"Is this a haunted spot? Are you looking for a hint of the future, as the girls do on Hallowe'en?" said his gay voice at her ear.

Her heart gave the restive bound of a captured wild animal, and the sense of danger brought all her woman's guard to the rescue.

"My future was foretold long since—I have no interest in searching for the unknown," she said coldly, releasing her supple body from the audacious arm with one easy swing. "How did you know that I was here?"

"I did not," said Eric quietly, his blue eyes looking down into hers with suppressed mischief. "I came up because Mrs. King told me it was the 'show place' of the neighbourhood. My luck stood me in good stead, but it was really unpremeditated."

She glanced away from him in her annoyance at having taken it for granted that he had followed her, and saw his horse tethered quietly beside her own amongst the bushes. "I beg your pardon," she said a little stiffly. "But your manner was misleading."

"When you see a pretty girl leaning dangerously over the water it is your natural instinct to save her an impromptu bath!" said Hillier innocently. "Isn't it customary out here?"

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The corners of her mouth longed to relax, and she resisted a smile with difficulty. There was something in his gay good-humour that was infectious. "I don't know," she said indifferently. "I am not in the habit of being rescued in that way, at any rate."

He glanced at her quickly, half resentful. "I should hope not!" he said. "Though I think the less of the male element in your life, nevertheless."

"You will be able to judge them better next week," said Ellice coolly. "You will meet them all at the dance at Burnside."

"Shall I? And shall I meet you too?"

"I think not," said Ellice cautiously. She had learned not to refuse Lily's invitations point blank until the last moment, to avoid friction. "It is a long way from Mafoota to Mr. Hoax's Penn."

"Is that the host's name?"

"Yes—surely you have heard it often enough at Hillside! Willie Hoax."

The diminutive in her mouth did not seem to please him. "I dislike that name altogether," he said discontentedly. "Will is the only contraction bearable. Willie is a little boy in turn-down collars, to my mind!"

"And William is a footman!" assented Ellice. "Nevertheless, Mr. Hoax is Willie to all his world."

"Are you of his world?"

"Naturally! I live at Mafoota."

Something in her tone enlightened him without her intention. "Is he a bachelor?" he demanded.

"At present. Yes."

"But he has pointed out to you that the present is not all his desire! He appears to have the courage of his convictions."

"Burnside is a very pleasant house to visit, in spite of its

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having no mistress, I hear," remarked Ellice amicably. "You will probably enjoy yourself there like other men."

"How do other men enjoy themselves at Burnside?"

"Oh, there are plenty of dark corners and a lot of girls. I believe Mr. Hoax provides the means, and leaves his guests to find the way," she remarked drily.

He flung up his head a trifle impatiently. "I am not a boy—I can't flirt," he acknowledged. "At my age one doesn't waste time in going half way there and back again. I get impatient and take a short cut!"

His glance at her apprised her of a danger near her at the present moment, and gave her a sense of panic. Something of her unapproachableness seemed gone with the feminine skirt, and she grew frightened to be alone with him up there by the deep blue silence of the Hole, in the rich breeding world where the sap was always rising. Her eyes instinctively sought her horse for a means of escape, and he saw and understood her.

"Before you run away from me (as I see you are going to do!)," he said, barring her way with six feet of good bone and muscle and very determined square shoulders, "I want to speak seriously to you. We have played at being friends and jested on the surface for nearly three weeks. Don't you think it is time we touched the undercurrent of our lives for once?"

The softness froze on her lips, and her eyes shrank from his. Even her incongruous boyishness became suddenly a feminine dignity, as she stood at bay, a prisoner until he should speak, but unsubdued.

"I have never asked your pardon, Ellice," he persisted, without being turned one whit from his purpose. "At first it was impossible—and besides I did not greatly care if you forgave me or not. Now I want to tell you that you have misjudged me in one way—you accused me of unfaithfulness. I have not been unfaithful to you."

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He did not add that circumstances and a woman's skill had been the preventives rather than his own will. Men are apt to ignore defeat if it can be utilised, and call it victory. Perhaps, too, at the moment, he really believed in his own desire for virtue.

She stood before him, still silent, her face a protest. But she could not stop his speaking.

"You wrote me a very bitter letter," he went on. "Perhaps I deserved it—but at least it was not true in all its accusations. Don't you think you owe me something for that? Can't you afford to forgive the venial sin if I forgive the injustice of your arraignment?"

She answered at last, as unexpectedly as hurriedly. "We have both learned charity, I hope. We can afford to forgive each other—only let us ignore the whole matter, too, and not refer to it again. I was very young, and very crude. I have learned to be broader-minded through a very bitter lesson."

Her face took its noblest look of patient sorrow—a strange grave shadow that was almost mysterious. He gazed at her half wondering, and half jealous of the unknown cause.

"Tell me!" he said simply.

"I had a very terrible experience—last year," she said, as if the explanation were difficult. "There was a man—"

"Did you care for him?"

"Oh, no—it was not that that taught me. But the pain of it—the hurt that all love seems to bring!" She paused, and lifted a rosy face honestly to his asking eyes. "He cared for me!" she said softly, and looked half shamed and half proud. "He cared for me so much that when I tried to act Providence and asked him to right a wrong which I thought he had done to a woman, he—married her. Oh, I was a fool! a fool! What right has a woman to judge for a man or even for another woman! We can only try to be good for ourselves. But I

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thought I was doing rather a fine thing in making an example of him—a white man marrying a black woman because they had lived together.”

He caught back an exclamation. “Poor devil!” was all he said. The license allowed between Black and White was not one of which he cared to avail himself in his own fastidiousness; but being a man he could, broadly, understand his fellow-man. “Well—he married her for the sake of your good opinion?”

“Yes—they say he drank himself into a semi-stupor, and after he had married her he took fever and—and I found him dying, in her hut. . . . I don’t quite know what happened to me while I sat there watching him, but I seemed all at once to have altered. I had never loved him, and yet I had taken on myself the task of judging him. Even love—the most devoted love—has hardly a right to a decision for its object!”

The grief and pity in her eyes drew him nearer to her as if by instinct. He laid his hand upon her shoulder, and she did not draw back. “Poor little girl!” he said kindly. “Don’t think of it—don’t blame yourself too much. Perhaps after all it was just as he would have wished.” The same consolation had been offered by Dick Pryce, but she chafed under it, restlessly.

“Do you know I think what humiliated me most is that I gave him nothing in return for what he gave me!” she confessed almost under her breath. “Say what you will, it is so *great* a thing to be loved! No one except Uncle Dick and Ronald Arbuthnott ever cared for me very much.”

In her self-absorption she did not even think of the sting her words conveyed, much less intend it. But his hand dropped from her shoulder and he turned his face to the mysterious blue of the calm pool with a look in his eyes that she did not see. All she noticed, vaguely, was that he suddenly stood

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very square, his hands linked behind him in a rather effective manner, the attitude giving him an air of self-reliance. Lynda Odell would have recognised it as very characteristic; Ellice, who had been his wife for one week, knew him far less.

"At least he has had your thoughts for three years, if not your heart," he said with faint resentment. "I suppose he lived in the neighbourhood? Was he a Penn-keeper?"

"He was busha to a horrible coloured man who had acquired a property by very shifty means—oh, it was such a spoilt, unhappy life altogether! Before he came here he was very much down on his luck—he told me about it by degrees. He was trying to grow ginger in the bush, beyond the Crown Lands, and nearly starved. It was a place called *Look Behind*—he said that he thought it was named so because the men who went there left all their best hopes and prospects in the past. But, do you know, I sometimes think that it is an allegory of this whole Island."

"Of Jamaica?"

"Yes. You can see it all round you—in the men who have settled here, and the country itself. It used to be the gold mine of England, and now it is but a third-rate Colony. Don't you see what I mean? The towns, with their makeshift houses and their lack of stability, and the petty squabbles over local interests between the Government and the Press and the people,—even the society here is shoddy! The men forget their manners, and the women lose touch with civilization. I always feel that we are running downhill, and we shall never go up again. But the lovely, lonely land is as rich and ready as when Venables landed at Port Royal, and is like a pathetic memory. Jamaica is the real Country that is called *Look Behind!*"

She spoke with an earnestness that puzzled him, and, to say truth, left him a little impressed. To Arbuthnott with his

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larger experience, Ellice's acquired knowledge of the country, and incidentally of Penn-keeping, had seemed a thing to smile at, almost indulgently, as at a child who plays at being grown up; but to Hillier it seemed a little phenomenal, and he was inclined to listen respectfully. There was a half tender admiration in his face as he stood looking at this new Ellice who had so little in common with the stiff, shy girl he had married—an Ellice who seemed to have expressed her freedom in the boyish dress, and to have acquired the glow and enthusiasm of young manhood with her expanding mind and body.

"We all have our Country which is called Look Behind, I suppose," he said half prophetically. "But—I wish you would look forward a little, Ellice!"

She came back to the present with a start, and her abstract musing flew before the reality of his eyes. She felt the danger of the situation again, and struggled mentally against his mastery, protesting to her own heart that she was not ready for it—not yet!

"I have told you—my future is prosaically certain," she said coldly, standing at bay, half petulantly feminine, half defiantly boyish.

"Yes. And what is it—in your own mind?"

"Just the same as at present. I shall live at Mafoota with Uncle Dick, and know as much of the Penn as a woman can, and help him to the best of my ability."

"But, my dear child," he protested a trifle impatiently, "don't you see that the position is untenable? Some day the truth is bound to come out, though I will hold my tongue as long as you please," he added with a certain graceful courtesy.

She shook her head obstinately. "I don't see it. I am quite happy here. Why should you try to alter things? I do not blame you for the past, and you surely need not blame

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me for the present! I don't want to interfere with you in any way."

If the retort irritated him he took his punishment bravely and endured as one who had deserved it. But he had the advantage in the verbal fencing match of knowing human nature better than Ellice. She was an unskilled antagonist opposed to the experience of Eric's thirty-five years. He did not answer directly; he laid his hands with a sudden swift-ness on her shoulders and looked down into her face, and his voice had fallen to a whisper.

"Are you sure you are quite satisfied, Ellice?" he said breathlessly. "Do you think you will go on with this life year after year, and still be satisfied?"

"I love Mafoota!"

"Mafoota is inanimate nature—remember that you are a woman!"

"I have Uncle Dick—"

"You will want some one else one day—you may even want me!" The daring voice was as little to be avoided as the strong hands holding her. "Ellice, won't you give me another chance?" he said suddenly, and the urgent tone frightened her more than all that had gone before. "I will let you alone—I won't claim anything of you indeed, until you are ready. But we are tied to each other, remember, and however in different we may school ourselves to be, there is no other chance of happiness for us."

"I can't!" she stammered in reply, all her grave self-possession suddenly routed. "You frighten me—I don't want to!"

But the incoherent protest did not seem to rebuff him as she had intended, and a gleam of satisfaction came into his eyes at the childish ending of her denial—"I don't want to!" contradicting the "I can't!" with which she began. He kept his scrutinising gaze on her face for a moment as if he read

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something unconscious in her, for he smiled a little teasingly as he released her.

"Oh, very well. Of course, if you don't want to I must take that as final. We can still be friends?"

"Y-yes," she assented dubiously, but there flashed across her mind an old triolet that she had read somewhere—

"Friendship is dead—
We should but mock her bidding her arise.
The words of love once said
Friendship is dead!
For fear of what I read
I could not meet your eyes.
Friendship is dead—
We should but mock her bidding her arise !"

"And I think I really ought to meet your uncle!" Eric remarked demurely, following her as she marched off to her horse. "Suppose I come to tea to-morrow?"

"Do you want me to tell him that you are coming?" she asked curtly, as she put her foot into the stirrup and swung herself up with what she felt a horribly masculine ease.

"Well, it would be safer, wouldn't it? You might mention that you met me, looking at my reflection in the Blue Hole (!) and that I was so importunate about making his acquaintance that you had no choice but to ask me—eh?"

"Very well," she answered with an unwilling smile; but the troubled look was still in her eyes as she turned for a last look at the peacock-blue water, almost as if she left her peace of mind behind her in the deep cool spot. The ripple of it, going down into the valley, died away as they turned their horses' heads towards Roehampton and rode soberly homewards through the golden evening. The conversation was desultory, and Eric never transgressed the law she had laid down; yet whenever she glanced at the handsome debonair

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face at her side something seemed to startle her in her own senses—a warning of her nerves which thrilled to an unseen touch, as the strings of a violin vibrate beneath the hand of a master. And at last she would not look at him, though the avoidance gave her a sense of defeat.

“For fear of what I read
I could not meet your eyes !”

Erie seemed perfectly unembarrassed and happy. He shook hands where their roads divided, at Shoe-myself Gate, and went on to Hillside, back to badly cooked food and Lily's soiled household, but for once the approaching supper cast no shadow upon him, and even an early swarm of hard-backed beetles did not rob him of more than a few damns, though he had to comb them out of his brush before he could smooth his hair, and they flopped into his bath and drowned themselves all night. Perhaps he was growing hardened to the drawbacks of Jamaica; perhaps he saw the end of his stay at Hillside already in view.

CHAPTER XX

“Ah! the playtime she has known
While her goldilocks grew long,
Is it like a nestling flown,
Childhood over like a song?
Yes, the boy may clear his brow,
Though she thinks to say him nay,
When she sighs, ‘I cannot now—
Come again another day.’ ”

JEAN INGELow.

A MAN'S jealousy is almost always physical; but a woman's is mental. The fact that Eric had been faithful to her, was a much greater point in his estimation than in Ellice's. As a matter of fact she would not have considered the material infidelity as so much more serious than the moral one, and what had really stung her—even when most indifferent—was the neglect in the eyes of the world. Her husband had deserted her for another woman, and on the face of things that other woman had the position that should have been the wife's. What the actual relations between Eric and Mrs. Odell had been mattered very little in reality to Ellice. Even had she loved him it would have been his tenderness that she grudged, rather than his moments of passion.

It was, naturally, different with the man. He believed his wife when she told him that she had not cared for the other man who was but a name to him, but the pity and regret in her eyes made him suspicious against his better feelings. It was only in Nature that the fellow should have made love to her—Eric judged according to his own lights, and did not

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blame Arbuthnott for a result that he regarded as inevitable. Of course he had kissed her—at least he was a fool if he had not tried, and the way in which Ellice had spoken of him suggested that she would not have withheld her forgiveness for such an indiscretion. At this point in his meditations Eric Hillier swore, and was filled with a most wholesome desire to regain possession of his own property. But he had forfeited his right to snatch Ellice out of other men's grasp, and was at last face to face with the inevitable consequences of his own actions. As long as he had not cared, the Nemesis that should have followed him appeared to have forgotten the debt, but Eric began the payment that night, when his arms felt empty. . . .

Against her will Ellice delivered the message Hillier had suggested, to Richard Pryce, but she hoped that something might put off the meeting and delay his appearance. She had expected that if he came he would come with Jersey King, but her dismay increased rather than otherwise to see a single horseman cantering up the slope towards the house at tea-time the next afternoon, for she felt that Jersey's presence would have added an outside element and made the situation less maddeningly domestic. Dick Pryce had but just "cleaned himself" for tea, and was standing with her and Roy in the open doorway when Hillier came in sight. He took the pipe from his mouth and held it for a minute, his keen eyes narrowed to criticism of man and horse. Eric did not sit like the Penn-keepers in the neighbourhood. He was not content merely to jog; he really rode his horse, and appeared to be in perfect sympathy with it.

"I bet that's your friend from Hillside!" said Dick Pryce, and Ellice tried in vain to read his opinion in his tone. "It's no one from these parts."

"Yes, Uncle," she replied dubiously. Eric's approach filled

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her with a sensation of being trapped, and when the black boys ran to take his horse, and she heard the quick tread with which he entered Mafoota—her refuge of three years!—it sounded like the tramp of doom to her. The two men met on the verandah, for the Penn-keeper moved out deliberately to meet his guest, the bloodhound still beside him, and he shook hands without waiting for an introduction from Ellice. She heard the two voices confusedly, words of explanation and acceptance that buzzed in her ears; but she stood as if unable to move until they turned round and joined her.

“You don’t want me to make you known to my niece,” Dick Pryce said easily. “I hear she’s been showing you round the Penn. She’s the best guide you could have, barring me. We call her Busha here!”

“Miss Honouram has made me feel my own ignorance!” said Hillier lightly. “Her knowledge of stock shames mine—I could go to school to her!”

But Ellice did not answer, even by a smile. She felt a sense of revolt at the whole situation, and she almost hated him for his indifference in pronouncing her assumed name. He was as perfectly at home as if he had been a frequent guest at Mafoota, and Dick Pryce accepted him with the hospitality of the Colonist. Even Roy went over to the enemy, and after one long stare wagged a sagacious tail and licked his hand in token of comradeship from this time forth. If there were a stiffness amongst the party it was due to Ellice, who directed her few remarks at the tea-table to the two bookkeepers rather than to any one else. She had her old seat, next to the Penn-keeper, Whitworth being opposite, and Saunders next to him. No one sat at the end of the table since Lily Scott’s conversion into Mrs. King. Ellice had flatly refused to sit anywhere but by Uncle Dick, and Jersey King’s place next to her had remained empty. Hillier sat there now and she was irritatedly

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conscious of his easy sociability. He was almost flirting with her in spite of her unresponsive indifference, and seemed perfectly satisfied with the relations between them, or to have forgotten that he had touched earnestness in demanding anything more. It seemed that he was easily consoled, or else it had been but a passing phase. Ellice felt that she was being denied the privilege of being unreasonable, and listened in resentful silence while he talked Penn-keeping with Dick Pryce. There was nothing to find fault with even in his manner. It had just the courteous respect for the older man's experience that suited their relative positions.

"I'll give you a hint for cattle breeding, if you think of working stock," said the Penn-keeper, just as Ellice was trying not to wonder how Hillier had made love, and whether he called the other woman darling? "In this country they shrug their shoulders and say that cows must be in poor condition with young calves, so they don't try to prevent it. Now that's just the time when they want the richest fodder. Feed them up—the young stock will repay you in a year or two."

"I saw a fine herd being driven from one pasture to another as I came up," remarked Hillier. "There did not seem much wrong with the calves."

"There was a good deal wrong with the driving of them, though," put in Saunders. "I saw that herd—they were being changed from Five Corners into Tom Tidler's Ground, sir"—he turned to Dick Pryce—"and the men had got them bunched in the road, and didn't give them room enough. You must let them take their time when there are calves, or the little ones get crushed."

"We are buying Mysore next week," said Pryce. "King is going to Montpelier. My niece has been at me to try the Mysore half-breed for draught almost since she came here, and I'm going to give them a trial. If you are interested, Mr.

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Hillier, I should advise your going, too. The Indian cattle at Montpelier are one of the shows of the country, and King is sure to put up at the Hotel, so you'll be comfortable enough."

"I should intrude on a family party," said Hillier, laughing. "Mrs. King and the baby are going, too. She wants to get down to Montego Bay and do some shopping."

"She wants an outing!" said Dick Pryce, with a chuckle, and Whitworth grinned. "Trust Lily! But if she's there, you'd better go along too, Ellie, and look over the cattle. I'm booked for the mules next week—there's a man from Brow's Town coming up to buy a dozen, and I can't leave. But it will be a good lesson for you."

"Very well, Uncle," said Ellice absently. She was more concerned with the tones of Eric's voice, in spite of her reluctance, than with the Indian cattle for the moment, though she had been keenly anxious to see them and judge for herself ever since Arbuthnott told her of their qualities. Mafoota bred Hereford and Creole cattle hitherto, and did not use the Mysore even for draught, and Ellice had had a great desire to give them a trial—it was owing to her persuasions, as Dick Pryce said, that he was sending Jersey King to buy certain steers. On any other occasion Ellice would have looked forward to going to Montpelier Penn with keen interest, even though in company with Lily King; but she was distracted by the fact that Eric was making an excellent tea, and seemingly more interested in the cassava cakes than in her, and it is hard for a woman to run second to her own culinary feats.

There is no denying that Eric was enjoying his food very much. After some weeks of Mrs. King's tough meats and Creole cooking, the clean wholesome fare at Mafoota found him with an excellent appetite. Since Lily's departure, the alteration in the household had made rapid strides and Ellice

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had successfully obtained white napery for the table as well as getting the silver properly cleaned. It had been uphill work, because the traditions of Mafoota were those of any other Penn whose table decorations are allowed to slide, and the servants had thought it senseless to rub plate about which the housekeeper had never bothered. It was a proof of Ellice's determination that as Eric sat at the tea-table his fastidious taste found nothing to compare disadvantageously with any English household. The delicious honey and white bread tasted the better, he thought, for the fine linen cloth, and he appreciated the great bowl of honeysuckle and red roses and jasmine the while he did ample justice to the home-made cake.

"I suppose you live Jamaican fashion up at Hillside?" remarked Mr. Pryce with a twinkle under the penthouse brows. "Breakfast at eleven suits Lily, because she needn't get up so soon!"

"Mrs. King is merciful and sends me early coffee," said Hillier evasively. "But the ride over has given me an appetite—I am making disgraceful inroads on your cake!"

"It's Ellie's cake," said the Penn-keeper placidly. "She's a fearless little cook, and even the heat of the kitchen can't scare her off. I'm growing fat since she revolutionised the food here. Even thirty years of Jamaica haven't killed my greed for English dainties!"

It is probable that Ellice went up some twenty degrees in her husband's opinion at that moment. He felt not only the respect that all men give to the woman who has power to feed them well, but actual gratitude at the present moment. She was not looking at him, however, and his bold eyes could only waste their approval on her round burnt cheek and sleek golden hair. He had always known that she had beautiful hair, but as the crown to a pinched, emotionless face it had seemed an incongruous adjunct.

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"Here Life smiled, 'Think what I meant to do!'
And Love sighed, 'Fancy my loss!'"

The day had been intensely hot since the breeze of early morning had died away. Earth was only now waking from her sleep in the broad noon, and the air seemed to oppress Ellice for once. She rose rather abruptly when tea was over, and deserting the men went up to the room that had been Lily King's. It was empty now, save for the piano, swept and ungarnished and bare. Ellice sat down and began to sing to herself to alleviate her own intangible restlessness. She did not know what had come to her, and resented the intrusion of Hillier's presence and the mental atmosphere it brought to her. She was glad that he was out of sight—glad to be rid of his tormenting eyes and disturbing personality. With the exception of Dick Pryce she had found it easy to ignore any man in her existence at Mafoota, even Ronald Arbuthnott being but a reality to her because she chose. But whether she wished or no her senses were conscious of Hillier's presence, and answered his voice or his look with a little thrill that shocked her. It seemed as if she had left her peace of mind at the Blue Hole, and she was restless and unhappy, having found no compensating joy to take its place.

"Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love,
Wherever the sun shines, the waters flow.
It hurts the snowdrop, it hurts the dove,
God on His throne, and man below."

The young voice sang the haunting little song softly, as if finding a new meaning in the words. The bookkeepers had gone out again to their work, but Mr. Pryce had taken Hillier out on the verandah, and as they smoked and talked Eric could hear, in the pauses, his wife's voice in the room above, and took a strange pleasure in the resisted impulse that made

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him want to rise and go up to her. He had no thought beyond the moving to her side—a desire to be near to her, born, perhaps, of the eternal Summer. The girl herself sang on, wistfully, unconscious of an audience.

“Hurt as it may, love on, love ever,
Love for love’s sake like the Father above,
But for whose brave-hearted Son we had never
Known the sweet hurt of the sorrowful love!”

“Do you think of settling in this country, Mr. Hillier?” asked Dick Pryce, and Hillier had to pull himself together to answer.

“I don’t know. I have some land in St. Thomas, but King says it is hardly fit for Penn-keeping.”

“It depends a good deal on the land. A man can’t judge who hasn’t seen it. But it’s good for cultivation of some sort, you may bet your last dollar, if it’s in Jamaica. The difficulty with us out here is that we lose our backbone after a few years of the climate, and we want the land to cultivate itself. The man who gives Jamaica a little capital and a little energy will get his interest anyway.”

“You believe in the Colony then? Miss Honouram was giving me a lecture in pessimism yesterday.”

There was a quick comprehensive flash in Dick Pryce’s eyes. “Did she? Ah!” he said. “She didn’t urge your settling in the Island, then!—What we want out here,” he broke off suddenly, “is the small farming class—young men who can’t make land pay in England, but are not afraid to use their hands where it will. The Creole is no good in Jamaica; we want emigrants. And we don’t want an owner who uses his Penn or his Plantation as a country house for three months of the year, either!”

“Ah!” said Hillier, following the dying notes upstairs rather

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than his host's wisdom. "But you get a lot of that, I suppose."

"Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love!'"

repeated the young voice, sadly.

"Yes, and that's the reason the land is all getting into the hands of the coloured people. Nobody cares a damn for the future of the Island. Even the Government is made up of theorists who make tours of inspection along beaten tracks, and never take the trouble to ask information of the men who live off them and do know. I could teach the officials more in a week, by merely showing them round my few thousand acres, than they will ever learn by staying at the nearest hotel and making up picnic parties amongst themselves.—There's a storm coming up," he added imperturbably. "You'll have to let us put you up, my boy, unless I mistake the signs."

Eric's heart gave an unreasonable bound as he glanced at the horizon. The day was darkening quickly—too quickly to be natural, and already a low muttering was to be heard among the hills. Even if he took his departure at once, and rode hard for Hillside, he would be soaked before he got in, and run the risk of the storm. At any rate he must stay for the evening meal, and—perhaps he would be forced to pass the night under the same roof with Ellice! He did not analyze his own feelings; he only knew that it was sweet and distracting and piquant to be at Mafoota with her whether they would or no, and though she was as far from him as a little nun in a convent.

Ellice also had heard the storm, and left her music with some apprehension. The first few drops of rain fell as she went to the window, and then the steady downpour of the overcharged Heavens. It relieved the heat of the day, but the electricity of the atmosphere still seemed to prick her veins, and made her long vainly for Hillier's departure. She knew that he must stay to supper, but when she heard Mr. Pryce

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offer him Jersey King's old room she looked up half desperately to meet his eyes and see if he would accept.

"May I stay?" asked Eric mutely, before he opened his lips to thank his host.

"I will not give the decision—you may do as you like," said Ellice's quickly drooped lids. She was obstinately determined to be passive in this fight with Fate, and he took advantage of her neutrality. She heard his laughing acceptance, and went away to see that his room was ready, with a sense of fine irony. "But at least he shall have Uncle Dick to talk to, and no one else," she added to herself. "That is his excuse for being here—let him have it!"

She felt a little as if Hillier were the cuckoo in her nest, ousting her from her rightful place, when she went to bed soon after supper, and left him in her accustomed seat beside the old Penn-keeper. He was talking easily and pleasantly with his host, and only conventionally regretted to lose her society when he bade her good night. Roy rose to follow her, as if a little troubled by her unusual departure; but even he went back to the verandah after a minute's hesitation, and improved his acquaintance with Hillier's clothes that he might not mistake him for an enemy when they met again. Having registered the smell of him, this man might go and come as he would without fear of Roy's teeth.

"I suppose men like talking to men best," thought Ellice with unreasonable resentment, as she brushed out her long bright hair. "Neither of them missed me much!"

It was still raining by the time she had undressed, but the storm itself had passed. It had lasted about an hour and a half, magnificent peals of thunder interrupting the talk at the supper table, and jags of lightning leaping to and fro across the valley. It would have been impossible for Hillier to ride through it to Hillside; nevertheless his presence in the same

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house made sleep impossible to Ellice, to her own annoyance. She lay, staring up at the mosquito curtains and trying not to think of him in Jersey King's room not so many yards distant. No doubt he was untroubled by any such thoughts of her. Probably he was snoring. Had he snored? She forgot. But the mere speculation brought a little amused smile to her lips, followed by a blush unseen in the darkness. She had become so unmarried in her surroundings and associations that to let herself think of Hillier in the relation they had held to each other for one week was as immodest as picturing a stranger in the bed with her. She hated herself for remembering the least detail of her honeymoon, and cried shame on her heart that would not hate him.

"What is the matter with me?" said Ellice at last, turning restlessly among the cool sheets. "I never lie awake and think about men—it's horrible! . . . I wish he wouldn't look so, and speak so—it startles me. . . . I want—I—want some one else to care about, so that he need not matter to me at all!"

Suddenly she flung aside the curtains and rose. The moon was up and the rain had ceased, as she found when she went to the window, but fancying that the night would be fresher after the storm, she wrapped herself up in the identical white morning gown that had aroused Lily Scott's envy three years since, and went out. With careful hands she pushed back the window and stepped onto the verandah, for she had an indefinite reluctance that any one should hear her, and then leaning her arms on the wooden rail she steeped her soul in the beauty of the scene before her.

For the moon rode high, and had silvered all the loose mists which still lay in the valley, and their smooth masses were exactly like a fairy lake with the crests of the hills that rose out of them for islets. She could fancy the magic water lapping on the shores of fairyland, though the mirage lake was

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unflecked by a ripple. The unspeakable beauty of this new aspect of her loved view seemed to draw her to a climax, so that when as by instinct she turned her head and saw a figure approaching her over the grass, she was not surprised. Only her great musing eyes were full of love of the gentle Earth and her mighty meaning, as they met Hillier's, and for the first time there was no gainsaying in either face while they looked long and gravely at each other.

Apparently he had risen from sleep with the same restless impulse as herself, but for a full minute they neither of them spoke, though he came up close beneath the verandah and she bent over it towards him. Then he put his foot on the rail, as Arbuthnott had done once long ago, and swung himself up so that they were on a level, so close that their breath met and mingled while they looked into each other's faces. Perhaps it was the intense light that made him so passion-pale, and his blue eyes almost white; she trembled a little, but did not shrink even when he laid his hand on hers.

"I could not sleep for thinking of you—under the same roof, and yet so far away!" he said in a low voice. "I wonder what made you come out to me?"

"I could not sleep, either—"

"I think I must have drawn you to me with thinking of you. Do you believe in telepathy?"

"I never tried—"

"Let me see if I can influence you now—make your will submissive to mine, and do whatever I put into your mind!"

She looked at him as if half fascinated, her eyes held by his strong gaze. But she was unconscious of his will—she read the desire in his heart plainly enough without submission of her own, and leaning towards him kissed him for the first time willingly. Then she recoiled a little, ashamed of the gracious impulse, or of the mastery of his lips on hers.

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"Do you ever scream and say 'Don't'?" whispered Hillier suddenly, slipping his free arm round her, and drawing her against his shoulder. His audacious eyes pointed the words.

"No, I don't think so!" she retorted, nestling fearlessly into the circle of his arm. "If I screamed, you see, I shouldn't be collected enough to say 'Don't,'—and if I said 'Don't' I certainly shouldn't waste breath in screaming!"

"Oh!" he said, in a laughing whisper, "I see—but I had forgotten. Sometimes I can hardly believe that you are Ellice, even now. What has happened to you?"

"I told you—I was a girl when you married me. I am a woman now!"

The strange serenity that had almost awed him dawned again in her eyes as they wandered away from his face to the view—the fairy lake of silver mist with the purple islands floating in it. Of one thing he was at least aware, that his complacent intention of moulding his wife would never be fulfilled. She was moulded already, and unalterably, by influences in which he had had no part, and he might take or leave her, as she would let him, but she came with a developed character and personality that he must learn afresh, but could not influence. With a jealous impulse of anything that held her attention from him, however, he slid his hand up to her neck and turned her face to him again.

"Kiss me!" he coaxed, and a million tiny voices from the crickets in the grass seemed to echo the words in their insistent song——

"Kiss! kiss! kiss!"

Ellice had always fancied that the past would raise a barrier between them which would require a long explanation and gradual overcoming if the estrangement were ever to be healed. A score of years seemed hardly too long for its removal, and yet to her surprise it had vanished with that first kiss, and she found herself whirled into a new set of emotions and relations

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with Hillier before she had time to breathe. His own confession occurred to her mind—"I can't flirt—I get impatient and take a short cut!" It seemed to her true of the present instance, even while she leaned her face to his, and was glad that she need not struggle with Nature. The sap was rising everywhere around them in the breeding Earth—it made their hearts beat and their lips eager with a passion that all the cold moonlight could not chill. For the moment Ellice's senses swam, and the world was blotted out by his face—then she touched Earth again and remembered.

"I shall have to tell Uncle Dick—to-morrow!" was the first thing she said.

"What are you going to tell him?"

She did not answer, and his caressing hand drew back the mass of her silken hair from its fall over her face.

"Will you tell him that we are married?" he asked.

"Shall I tell him that?" she returned shyly.

"No!" he said imperiously. "Tell him that you love me, first—then the other seems a little thing."

"That shall be to-morrow—
Not to-night,"

quoted Ellice with a little sigh.

"I must bury sorrow
Out of sight.
Must a little weep, love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, love,
Loved by thee!"

"O Eric, you will get so wet in that grass! I never thought about it till this moment. Do go back to your room like a dear boy, and don't catch cold! How did you get round?"

"I climbed out of the window—I dared not come through the house!" said Hillier, laughing.

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"I wonder Roy did not stop you—supposing he had taken you for a thief!" She gasped a little, and her hands instinctively clasped his arm instead of releasing him. "Those Cuban hounds can kill a man!"

"Roy was asleep at my door, but I called to him softly, and told him that I meant no harm. He wished me luck!"

"Nonsense!"

"Why not? He is a wise old fellow!"

"You are only talking to gain time. Go away now—"

"Must I really? I should like to stand here all night!"

"No, you must go—I want to sleep." She met his eyes and coloured warmly. "No!" she said breathlessly. "I can't! . . . yet. . . ."

"I won't ask it—until we have told 'Uncle Dick'!" he said tenderly. "I am not going to steal into your room like a thief, Ellice. You shall give me yourself honestly. Good night, my darling!"

He dropped on to the grass again and walked away from her as he had come, with noiseless steps. There was something rather feline in Eric, but it was always the larger Feline—he resembled the royal tiger rather than the household cat.

Ellice went back to bed and dropped asleep as sweetly as a child this time, without any effort. She had ceased to struggle against Nature, and she was very happy, without question even of the wisdom of her choice. A woman's ideals are, after all, set by her own requirements rather than by any standard of excellence. The great and good man is by no means the one she desires, so much as he whose tenderness, or indulgence, or comprehension suits best with her need. It is not those whom we admire that we love. She was only supremely fortunate in finding a natural mate in the man with whom she had blundered into matrimony.

CHAPTER XXI

'I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying here thy golden head,
My pride in happier Summers, at my feet.

.

But how to take farewell of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial, moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

DICK PRYCE, being a Magistrate as well as the best-esteemed Penn-keeper of his district, was the invariable recipient of begging letters from those among the black people who either would not work, or whose ambitions required that the white man should furnish them with capital for the career they saw before them. The Negro loves Law, but he is firmly convinced that Law should always be in his favour. Mr. Pryce was never sure that it was not his position as a Magistrate that made him responsible in the minds of the black population for all their failures. Those who claimed to have worked on his land (a frequent plea for charity) had a lingering memory of him as a man who was painfully difficult to hoodwink as a Penn-keeper, but as a Magistrate they always cheerfully regarded him—according to his own account—as a born fool.

On the day after the thunderstorm that kept Eric Hillier at Mafoota, a note was delivered to Dick Pryce which was a fair specimen of the Negro's use of the ability to write. He takes kindly to education up to the age of twelve, proving far

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quicker to grasp what is taught him than a white child of the same class. After twelve both sexes become dull and stupid, save in exceptional cases, and appear incapable of learning more. They stop short, however, with the power to read the most incendiary pamphlets, and with a certain clerkly handwriting, which they use to convey the most surprising sentiments. Dick Pryce sat on the verandah and read his letter with a grim smile. It was even better written than the average, and contained no mistakes in spelling.

"R. Pryce, Esq.

Dear Sir:—

Your humble servant kindly ask this favour of you not for my own sake, but the Lord's, I am so situated that I can call on no one else, but you, and that is as I am residing at Endeavour I ask you to take my horse on pasturage there on Boundary Common, for Christ's sake.

I am, Yours respectfully,

A. T. Watts."

"H'm!" said Dick Pryce. "I recollect the fellow. He was a schoolmaster at New Orleans, and a preacher in his leisure moments. He collected a big crowd round Shoe-myself Gate on one occasion, in the public road, and declined to budge for one of my mule carts which was carrying bamboo—we were riding the walls in those days. The Niggers in the cart got mad with the crowd and tried to drive them with the smaller bamboos, and the crowd turned on the cart men. There was a holy row! No, I'll see him damned 'for Christ's sake' before I help him to preach more sermons, indirectly, by pasturing his horses. Read his letter, Ellie!"

Ellice was half sitting, half lounging, at his feet, patting Roy's big, recumbent body as he lay stretched beside her.

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Her mouth was curiously set, and her eyes certainly did not see the letter with their mental vision, though she took it and read it. There had been a consistent absence in her manner since she first took up her position at Dick Pryce's feet, but he did not seem to notice it. The day was rounding to the brief twilight, and contrary to custom the Penn-keeper had not ridden out on some business or other after tea. He sat down on the verandah and smoked, and Ellice joined him, as if tacitly content to idle away the time till the evening meal. There was no one in the house but themselves, and a certain grave silence seemed to have settled on Mafoota. Only from the kitchen regions came the old monotonous song of which there was never more than one verse—

“Now when I wake in de mornin’
Don’t ’get my coffee early—
And if I want any money
I’ll run up in my writing desk!”

“Uncle Dick,” said Ellice abruptly, “I want to tell you something!”

He looked down quickly and saw her face white and set with her purpose. Her left hand lay unconsciously on her breast, as if she pressed something that lay there—the little gold circlet cutting into the white flesh. For a minute Dick Pryce looked at her—and then turned his eyes away as if he could not bear to watch her struggle and not help her. His big hand fell on her shoulder as if by instinct, and he made a movement as if to draw her to him.

“No, don’t!” she said, and her voice sounded as if she were choking, while for the first time she freed herself from his touch. “You don’t know—wait till I tell you. You think—you think—Uncle Dick, you know that man who stayed here last night?”

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"Hillier?" He nodded. "He's back at Hillside by now. He's a nice fellow, I fancy. What about him, Ellie?"

Still he was not looking at her. His eyes, under their pent-house brows, were staring over the slope of the grass to the little stream and the farther pastures. She could not read what was in them, and did not desire to do so. If he had looked at her she felt as if it would have killed her.

"I've told you an untruth," she panted at last in a hard, little voice. "I've lived a lie here for three years. I'm trying to tell you now—I'm trying to put it right."

She half rose, kneeling before him, her desperate face raised and her eyes piteous. He glanced at her quickly, and then with a muttered, "Damn! I can't stand it!" he took hold of her with his strong hands and drew her between his knees.

"What are you trying to tell me, little girl?" he said tenderly. "That you are not my niece at all, and that your name is Ellice Hillier, and not Eleanor Honouram? Is that the trouble?"

There was the silence of a lifetime, it seemed, a silence that pervaded all Mafoota, and made the old house listen, and the very outside world, while she gazed up into his eyes, maddened with question and suspicion of what might come next.

"Who told you?" she said, under her breath. "Not—"

"I knew before you came!" he answered, with quick reassurance. Then laying his great hand gently over her eyes he shut out the fear there as if it hurt him. "Ellie, dear, don't!" he said huskily. "I can't bear to see you look like that. It's like a child who thinks you are going to hit it! Come up close against me, and tell me what you want to tell without being afraid. You've never been afraid of me, honey!"

With a long shudder she drew herself against him, pressed closer, closer, her face hidden against his flannel shirt, and her

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arms clinging to him desperately. "Who told you?" she gasped. "How long have you known? Who told you?"

"Babbington!—Don't you remember that day you arrived here, and Jersey met you? Well, after all I found I could ride out, and I'd a fancy to see you, but before I ever set eyes on you I met a boy coming out with my mail, and I took the letter from Babbington, and read it. A clerk of his had seen you on the boat and knew all about you—he told me your story, too. I had time to think what I'd do on the way home. I took a short cut and rode across my own pastures and got home some time before you arrived. I didn't know then quite what would be the end of it—but I meant to offer you a shelter at least. Only when I saw your little white face and desperate eyes coming in to me, it came like an inspiration—I met you as my niece, and waited for you to tell me that you were not."

"And I haven't told you—until now!—Oh, I was afraid!" she said pleadingly. "Afraid of losing you. I stole Eleanor's welcome and Eleanor's home—but I wanted it so badly. Uncle Dick, you are not going to push me out into the cold again?"

"Sh-sh-sh-sh-sh!" he said sternly, and it struck her wonderingly that he had never spoken to her with any sternness until she doubted him. "Don't talk like that—there's a bond between you and me deeper than mere flesh and blood. When I saw you come in at that door I let you in at my heart, too—poor little girl!"

"Were you sorry for me, Uncle Dick?"

"Very sorry, and very sore for you, too, Ellie. I knew all the facts of your story, though Babbington's a brief fellow and writes straight to the point and no more. He told me that he thought you'd been badly treated, and asked me to give you a shelter for a time at least. But you hadn't been here

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ten minutes before I'd decided to give you a shelter for as long as you chose to stay."

The young arms clung a little closer round the burnt neck, and the young face rubbed its downy smoothness against the rough grizzled chin. Ellice gave a little checked sob, but when he tried to lift her up to his knee she resisted and kept her kneeling attitude.

"No, let me be—I'm best here. It seems so strange that you know. And I've been afraid of your finding out all this time!"

A glimmer of a smile dawned in his eyes for the first time, and he patted her gold head gently with the same touch that he gave Roy. She felt the reassurance of it as much as the dog did, for if he was master to the animal he was equally in authority as protector to the girl.

"When I heard of Hillier's advent, and saw you troubled, I was very nearly giving it away," he confessed. "And once last year—when I thought you were beginning to think too much of Ronald Arbuthnott."

"Not that way, Uncle!"

"No, I found that out—so did he, poor devil!"

But another thought had startled Ellice. "Uncle Dick, if you knew, how was it that other people didn't? Are they all in the secret? They have all called me Miss Honouram!"

"They didn't know, Ellie, though it was a wonder it didn't leak out. But, you see, this is a widespread district, and news travels vaguely. I confiscated the papers the day you came, and made up some cock and bull story for the boys, because, of course there was an account of the 'sad occurrence' of a young lady dying on board the steamer, and all the details about its being my niece!"

"I never thought of that!"

"Of course you didn't. You might land in England a dozen

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times, and change identities with some one who died on the boat, and not a word would get into the papers. But out here every atom of news is of value—particularly local news. It was bound to make copy.”

“But I suppose some one must have read it round about here—at Endeavour, for instance.”

“I suppose they did, but you must remember you were not anxious to make acquaintances round about for a long time, and if any one noticed Eleanor’s death they had forgotten it by then, or thought I had another niece come out to take her place. It’s only in the last year that you’ve visited in the neighbourhood, and the Sopers and the Randals and Willie Hoax knew no more of you than you of them when you first arrived.”

“I see—it seems very simple. But then—” she almost started up again—“my letters Home! Oh, Uncle Dick, did they know? Eleanor’s people?”

He looked into the distended pupils of her eyes a little curiously. They were as frank as the eyes of a child for all their anxiety.

“What do you think, Ellie? What do you wish yourself?” he said.

“I hope with all my heart and soul that you told them! I have hated myself for that one thing—I hope Eleanor’s sister has no cause to hate me!”

Dick Pryce stooped forward and kissed her. “That’s all right, little girl!” he said. “Eleanor’s sister is a good woman. I wrote and told her the whole story by the first mail after you came, and asked her to keep up the fiction a little. You didn’t think your funny stilted little letters would deceive anybody who knew Eleanor, did you? You were the easy person to humbug! We’ve all been in league against you.”

She drew a long breath of relief, and her head dropped to its

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old resting-place on his shoulder. "Uncle Dick, you know I am—married?" she whispered with a sigh.

"Why, yes, honey, I knew that before I knew you, necessarily."

"Yes, and—you've seen Eric?"

The twinkle came back into the eyes she could not see, for her own face was hidden.

"Yes. Decent sort of chap to look at, eh? Handsome is that handsome does hits him rather hard, though."

Ellice twisted a button on the flannel shirt with nervous fingers which threatened imminent peril to its remaining there. "I've met him a good deal riding about Mafoota, Uncle Dick," she said slowly. "I don't think—I don't think—I am angry with him any more!"

"Made it up?" enquired Mr. Pryce, laconically

"Y-yes.—In a way!" she added hastily.

"Oh! I hope he finds that reservation satisfactory," said Dick Pryce drily. "He struck me as a gentleman who wouldn't care for conditional reconciliations. All or nothing looks more like his motto!"

The golden head wriggled a little farther down against the flannel shirt, and the one visible ear caught fire from memory and burnt crimson. "He wants me to go back to him!" she said almost inaudibly.

"And you think he hasn't deserved that?"

"No—yes—I don't know! I am very unsettled—I wish he hadn't come! I was quite happy."

The big chest beneath her head heaved once as if in a long sigh. "Do you want to go back to him?" said Dick Pryce, gently. "Say just what's in your heart, Ellie!"

"I don't know, Uncle Dick! One half of me wants to stop here, and the other seems dragging away to Eric. I never felt like this before—"

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Dick Pryce held her if possible a little more tenderly than before, and putting one large knotted hand under her chin raised the troubled rosy face and looked into it. "You're a woman, and you want your mate, that's the gist of the matter, isn't it?" he said simply.

"Oh, no, Uncle Dick—no! How can you!" she protested, the soft blush deepening to painful shame. "I don't want to go back to him—it's—it's just that that stops me! I want time—"

But Dick Pryce laughed. He was a man, and even Ellice's scruples were, in his eyes, trifles to be put on one side if weighed against Nature. "No one's going to hurry you," he said. "You shall have as much time as you like, and that husband of yours shall wait—serve him jolly well right, too! If he comes fooling about here I'll send him about his business, shall I?"

"Y-yes. Only—he must be awfully uncomfortable at Hillside!"

"What, with Lily making love to him?"

"Please don't, Uncle Dick! I know it's silly, but I hate to think of Mrs. King trying to flirt with Eric!"

Dick Pryce laughed outright. "You won't have the poor fellow yourself, and yet he mayn't console himself elsewhere! What a regular woman! Never mind, Ellie—he's not the sort to fall into Lily's snare. I had him over here to look him over and see if he were fit for you, and though he's not good enough for my girl perhaps, still I suppose I should never think any man fit for that, and if you like him, you shall have him—some day. But remember this, Ellie," and he spoke with sudden gravity, "as long as you wish, and whenever you can come, Mafoota is open to you. I should like you to promise to spend three months of the year here, at any rate."

"I will promise that, whatever happens!" she said quickly,

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and the final tone belonged to the woman who had developed apart from Eric Hillier and who would keep her word, however he might oppose it. "And I am not ready to leave Mafoota yet," she added more lightly. "Spending three months of the year here would be like the 'absent owner' system of which you so much disapprove, Uncle Dick!"

"Well, if you'll be obliging enough to have two sons, you can loan the second to me, and I'll train him up as a Penn-keeper, provided I live!" said Dick Pryce with a laugh. "The first boy's destiny I suppose we must leave to his father, but the second I think you might spare to Jamaica—"

But Ellice did not wait to answer. Her face was flaming again, and with a guilty scramble she got up from her lowly position just as the sound of hoofs announced the return of George Saunders and Arnold Whitworth for supper.

It seemed almost strange to her that nothing was altered, after the revelation she had had. She sat in her old place at table, the younger men still called her by Eleanor's name—above all, there was no change in Dick Pryce's voice and manner when he spoke to her, no diminution in the love and friendship between them. She realized now that it was this that she had feared to lose, and so deeply that her heart felt as if filled with a long absent peace in her infinite relief. She was still heiress of two great hoards—the new love and the old, and after long doubt and struggle it seemed to her that her barque rode safely at anchor in the haven where she would have it be.

But after she had gone to bed that night, and long, long into the darkness, a grey-haired man sat on the verandah with his head resting on his hands, and saw his brief snatch of home-life slip into the eager grasp of another man. He had only had it for three years—a feminine thing to love and protect, a bright presence in the old house, a gentler and more refined influence in his household. And he knew, while he sat there

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lonely, and the Cuban bloodhound licked his hand with the instinct of sympathy, that he must stand aside for very love, and put no obstacle between the wife and her destiny. For in this tangled Universe it is decreed that we can have no gain that shall not be another's loss.

CHAPTER XXII

“‘Is that the ladder on which one must climb? Then I will try my luck too,’ said the Prince; and the following day, as he felt quite lonely, he went to the tower, and said:

‘Rapunzel! Rapunzel!
Let down your hair!’

Then the tresses fell down, and he climbed up. Rapunzel was much frightened at first when a man came in, for she had never seen one before; but the King’s son talked in a loving way to her, and told her that his heart had been so moved by her singing that he had no peace until he had seen her himself. So Rapunzel lost her terror, and when he asked her if she would have him for a husband, she saw that he was young and handsome, . . . so saying ‘Yes,’ she put her hand in his.” . . .

Grimm’s Fairy Tales.

JERSEY KING arrived alone to pick up Ellice on his way to Montpelier to buy cattle. He brought a message from Lily to the effect that the baby—little beast!—had chosen that day to be so ailing that she could not leave. Ellice, rather cynically, enquired if they had sent for a doctor, for the child must be really sick, she judged, to compel its mother to give up a jaunt. She could fancy Lily’s methods of nursing once she was compelled to own that it could not be left—a slap to the wailing patient, and then a subsiding of herself in a flood of tears for her own disappointment. Lily was more black than white in her treatment of her child, and her affection for it was not at all to be denied because she submitted it to rough treatment did it irritate her. Ellice had seen a Negress in a passion

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pick up a child of three years old and bang its head against the wall by way of punishment. Fortunately the little woolly heads were the hardest parts of the children's bodies.

"What had I better do, Uncle Dick?" she said a little dubiously, looking at the old buggy with its team of wicked, capable mules, and Jersey sitting in sulky state by himself. "Can I go and stay at the Hotel without Mrs. King?"

"You'll never make a Penn-keeper if you put Mrs. Grundy before your cattle!" said Dick Pryce, and the taunt spurred Ellice to relinquish the hesitating conventionality. Truth to tell, she would not have hesitated a few months since, even the drawback of a tête-à-tête with Jersey being second in her mind to the purchase of stock. It was a sneaking deference to Hillier's disapproval that had influenced her, and she coloured faintly as she pulled herself together.

"I don't care a bit myself. I thought you might!" she declared mendaciously, and climbed into her place beside Jersey King—not as on a former occasion when he drove her, in the back seat, though the old buggy was double. Dick Pryce turned back into the verandah with a queer little smile on his lips.

It was not yet three in the afternoon, but they had an hour's drive before them, and Jersey wanted to see the authorities at Montpellier and arrange for seeing and choosing the steers next day. Had he driven over in the morning it might have been possible for him to get his business done and return the same day; but with characteristic certainty of his own importance he had failed to write and make the arrangement, and only learned when too late that he must await the pleasure of those from whom he wished to buy.

"I hear there are a lot of visitors at Montpellier, so the earlier we are the better. I must get over before the train can bring any more, for there has been an Officers' ride out this way

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and they also are expected in to-day or to-morrow," he informed Ellice.

"Will there be any difficulty in getting rooms?" she asked.

"I don't think so. They can put up forty at a pinch—it means doubling up, though. If the train brings any visitors this evening they may be hard pressed."

Ellice did not answer, for she was hardly listening, and was not greatly concerned—at the worst they must drive back to Mafoota. They were coming out of the valley to Roehampton, and would pass the Blue Hole, and her thoughts had flown back to the day on which she met Hillier there—the first day it always seemed to her of the dawn of a new feeling for him, or perhaps of her own discovery of it. She had not seen him for the last few days—not in fact, since her confession to Dick Pryce, and was thankful for the respite. Her blood started and her heart beat at the mere sound of his name, and she was as frightened as a bird fluttering in a snare—

"A wild thing taken in a trap
That sees the trapper coming through the wood."

The trapper was not yet in sight, but she beat her wings wildly at the mere expectation of him. She was "not ready," as she protested to Dick Pryce; nevertheless the thought of his being at Hillside all this evening and to-morrow morning tête-à-tête with Lily was an almost equally disturbing thought. No doubt his presence would in some sort console Mrs. King for not going to Montpelier, and though both Eric himself and Dick Pryce had assured her that Lily's blandishments were wasted in this case, Ellice could not forget the woman's fleshly attractions—the smooth warm skin, the suggestion of richness and luxuriance in her every movement, the appeal to sense in her large soft eyes.—

There was a group of trees suddenly to the left, the flash of

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water like the colours on a peacock's tail, a little summer-house of a hut on the right—she looked up to see the Blue Hole shining with memory. It was there, against that tree, that she had leant her hand to look down into the depths of the Hole as into the heart of a jewel, and had felt an arm steal round her waist. . . . Her heart beat against it again in fancy, and her ears heard the audacious wooing of his voice. She forgot to be jealous of Lily—there was no Lily here, only their two selves in all the world, while the splintered sunlight fell through the leaves on the wondrous water, and the song of it went all down the valley to Montpelier.

They began to go down themselves in another few minutes, the descent falling so swiftly and roughly that Jersey flung his body back to help the mules, and the beasts themselves went wide, flanks out and heads in, to resist the weight of the buggy lumbering down behind them. There is no brake on the wheels of a buggy, because it is specially necessary that there should be one, the hills of Jamaica taking up two-thirds of the roads, and the roads themselves being actually rocky when they come under the head of "parochial" and not "main." Ellice was glad for the mules' sake as well as her own when they bumped down to the level again. She believed in Jersey King's driving, but the strain of the hill told on them all together. Then there came half a mile of blinding white road—the Montego Bay road—and then the arch of the hotel, all smothered in a creeper that drops its leaves and blossoms again four times a year, and is very ugly indeed when it is bare, but just now was covered with green leaves and large, convolvulus-like flowers of an exquisite mauve.

I have heard the Montpelier Hotel called the best in Jamaica—not for show or size, but for comfort. Without disparaging the great American house at Port Antonio, I know of no spot in the Island of Jamaica so triumphantly beautiful, so full of

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a rich sense of peace, or so typical of a land flowing with milk and honey, as the stretch of country one sees from the verandah of the Montpelier Hotel. You cannot see the Great River, it is true, or the tributary stream from the Blue Hole; but you see the spirit of the waters in the freshness and greenness of the pastures, and in the very vegetation which, though so well cleaned, pushes its fearless way wherever it is allowed. Bragging Tom does not run at Knockalva before April; but there is no pasture in fair Shettlewood or Montpelier—the twin estates on either side of the Great River—that has not its trough or pool for the cattle, and the pipes carry the fresh water miles across the land, and there is neither drought nor tanks to distress the Mysore breed—the kings of this grass kingdom! There they roamed, knee deep, shoulder deep, in Guinea and Para, their great horns branching back like deers', and their white coats catching some silver gloss from the sun. As Ellice walked up the long flight of steps on to the verandah, and looked about her, her gaze was caught first by the white ribband of a road running from East to West, and the white herd of cattle. All the rest was strong green, with here and there a red gate, and the old buildings of the tobacco factory to break the monotony of the pastures. To the East, below the hill on which the hotel stands, was the roof of the little station. She recalled her arrival there three years since, a white-faced woman with undeveloped mind and body, bruised by her first contact with the world, and sick of life before she had more than tasted it. Jersey King had been the one to convey her from Montpelier to Mafoota—Jersey King had brought her back to-day—but how changed! There seemed a fate in it.

She was roused from her day dream by his voice calling her down to the lower floor. Here she found tea, and Jersey in some state of irritation. Things had not arranged themselves

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to his liking. The hotel, he told her, was so full that it was by great good luck he had procured a room for her. He himself must put up in the bachelors' quarters, a row of apartments on the steep incline to the outhouses, falling one below the other like buildings in a hillside street; and if the train brought more visitors he might be forced to share even that. Jersey's fair face was so like a thwarted child's in expression as he gave her the information, that Ellice marvelled again with a kind of surprised contempt at any grown man being so little lord of himself.

"Never mind," she said, consolingly. "Come and have tea, and let us hope no more visitors will come. It is late in the Season, now."

"What have you been doing?" he demanded, following her half grudgingly into the drawing room. "You seemed to vanish the minute my back was turned—but you are always as slippery as a mist!"

She ignored the half-resentful reference to her reserve. "I was looking at the view—and the cattle," she said quietly. "I wish we had tanks in our pastures, and need not drive our cattle to water."

"You want to rival the show Penn of Jamaica!" retorted Jersey with a short laugh. "They don't go in for these luxuries even at Knockalva!" He gave a short nod at the vista beyond the open windows—it was, as Dick Pryce quietly intended, a good object lesson for Ellice of what Penn-keeping could be with infinite patience and money spent on the land as well as drawn from it.

"Are the Indian cattle all white? There is hardly a dark one amongst that herd."

"No, but they seem to be breeding white or dun more than any other colour. I shall buy the light steers myself," said Jersey with a faint appreciation of his own authority.

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Ellice did not answer; her attention had been caught by a sudden stir and bustle on that side of the hotel which was beyond their sight. The train had brought visitors as Jersey feared, and he went off, grumbling, to try and secure that his room should be left to himself before Ellice finished her tea and followed him round to the front of the hotel, which seemed to have suddenly waked into bustle and life. There were two buggies under the shelter, and a saddle horse that caught her attention at once; she was sure she knew him, and thought he must belong to some one in her own neighbourhood—Willie Hoax, or the Sopers. Then it occurred to her that she must be mistaken, as the only people likely to ride in were the Officers who had been moving from place to place on their manœuvres. To avoid the people standing about in the lower rooms, however, rather than in any fear of undesired acquaintances, she went back to the upper verandah, and stood leaning on the rail as before, and looking long and silently at the scene before her with something new stirring in her heart. On all sides of her lay the rich landscape, the immediate foreground being filled with the ephemeral foliage of logwood which looked like green frost among the branches, and beyond and beyond was the grazing land, where the Indian cattle resembled spectral deer in the blaze of the level light. For the sun was going down, and all across the great pastures she could see the intense outline of mountainous greenery against a sky of tortured flame—hills beyond hills, silence beyond silence, girdling fair Shettlewood, and all asleep in the blessed gold of the finished day.

She had been conscious for some time of steps passing her, and of people going into their rooms, though she had not turned her head. Now, suddenly, she was hauntingly aware of a presence near her, so that she stirred and half looked round even before a man's arm touched the rail by her own, and

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some one leaned there beside her. Then she looked up into Hillier's face as if caught in the midst of thinking of him.

"You!" she said breathlessly.

"Why this unflattering surprise?" he said, with his slight laugh, but his eyes said something more, and much more emphatically, and she looked away, troubled, to the darkening landscape. The cattle were still more ghostly now, the road stood out sharply, a ribband of white between the green frost of the logwood. The first twinkle of light had blossomed in Shettlewood House, a dark blurr upon the hillside . . . against the dying colours of the sky were the intense mountains. . . .

"Uncle Dick sent you!" said Ellice with quiet conviction. The assertion seemed to express itself without intent on her part; but she saw again, with sudden intuition, the twinkle in the old man's eyes as he bid her good-bye, and told her not to put Mrs. Grundy above her Penn-keeping. He had not been really indifferent to the conventionalities for her.

"He knew I was coming," Hillier admitted. "He would not have sent you alone with King, had he not known."

"He chose a strange remedy!"

"Why?"

"You, as a chaperon, would hardly satisfy the neighbourhood—"

She guessed the impatient flush that rose to his face without turning her own eyes, and heard it in his voice.

"I am your husband!"

"That is not an obvious fact."

"No, but we can make it so, Ellice; let me tell the world—your world—that you belong to me. Let me tell King now!"—He half raised himself from the rail where he was leaning, and looked to catch the least assent; but he could see nothing but the beautiful golden hair and the line of her cheek. She was obstinately silent. He laid his hand on her arm, and his

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fingers closed there with imperious tenderness. "What am I to do?" he asked.

"I don't know—"

The momentary indecision made him bolder. "Let me tell King—after to-night it will be the only thing to do, to explain that I was with you—that I had a right to be with you—"

"Oh, no—no!" she said, shrinking, but the reluctance was half for her memory of what she had herself said to Jersey King on an occasion when he was implicated with a woman. She remembered her own bigoted attitude and her indictment of him with regard to Lily Scott. Lily had been Jersey's wife as much as she was Hillier's, but she had not been merciful in her supposition. Was it likely that Jersey would be merciful now? She shrank from the very thought of his knowing what was as yet a very sensitive joy, almost too shy to be handled in open daylight.

"I would rather that you wouldn't tell—Mr. King!" she said lamely.

"Why?" There was almost a personal suspicion in the quick tone. "Why should he in particular not know? He must know some day!"

"Yes, but not now—not here! It sounds such an impossible story!" she gasped feebly. "He might not believe you—"

"By Jove, he would have to! I should make him!" he said with a grim laugh. "Is that your only reason? You don't mind his knowing, personally?"

"I!"—Her contemptuous tone was his best assurance. "And besides, I—I can't acknowledge it, if that means—"

"It means coming back to me. Don't let us misunderstand each other over that. I want my wife."

The night seemed to touch them softly with its falling darkness, the scent of nameless sweet flowers crept up in the dusk, the first star came out in the dying sky—dying into the in-

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visible—the first firefly flashed past among the trees. His voice when he spoke seemed part of the seduction of the hour.

“Are you sure you can’t, Ellice? Were you sure that night in the moonlight at Mafoota?”

She kept a troubled silence. Half her nature, as she had told Dick Pryce, seemed yearning towards Hillier, half gainsaid his eager arms. The suggestion of being compromised, also, by the present situation, startled her like a trap. Even Uncle Dick was turned accomplice and had gently guided her towards the decision she would not make. It seemed as if they were both in league against her, and though she was half relieved at being overruled, she resisted by her very silence. She spoke no word nor answered his question, though the atmosphere was electric, full of meaning, and seemed to betray her. Something more intangible than thought surely passed from her to him as they stood side by side—an unformed confession, a natural attraction not to be denied. It ran through Ellice’s veins with a keen pleasure that stung her like a wound——

“Oh, the hurt, the hurt, and the hurt of love !”

Yes, she would be glad if it were really incumbent on her to acknowledge her marriage and to go back to Hillier. She felt the sap rise in all the breeding earth, and the warmth of innocent passion in her own body. In her heart she knew that she would be glad.

But her lips had not spoken, and a minute later he stood up and squared his shoulders to his usual erect carriage. There was, however, nothing conquered in the action, or in the ring of his voice through its apparent acceptance of her decision. “All right,” he said. “Then I must go on waiting, I suppose, —indefinitely.”

She heard his retreating foot along the verandah and descending the stairs. For a minute she listened a little blankly,

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as though wondering if he meant what he said. People might talk of her being at the Hotel with Jersey King, they might even comment on the fact that Hillier was there, too. It was easy to legitimise the whole thing by acknowledging their relations—and Uncle Dick had tacitly given him leave to plead his own cause. . . . Suddenly she put her hands up to her face in the darkness, as though her cheeks burnt. . . .

Hillier said nothing more to Ellice when they met at dinner, nor was there any betrayal in his manner. Nevertheless she hated the meal in the large bright room, and the strong light on her face, lest it should not be as perfect a mask as his. There were a goodly number of Americans present, and the sound of their voices took her back in fancy to her first arrival at the old Myrtle Bank Hotel. Fortunately for her leaping pulses, Hillier was on the same side of the table as herself, and at least he could not watch her ineffectual efforts to eat. It was a relief when even the pretence at a meal had ended, and she could go out once more to the alluring darkness and her own turmoil of thoughts.

Her room was on the east side of the Hotel, which has no front or back, but stands foursquare to the four points of the compass. Below her—for she had returned once more to the upper verandah—she could see nothing but the darkness of branches threaded by innumerable fireflies, and after a while a faint soft radiance that heralded the moon. It came up in mist, bringing with it a sense of that fairyland which had fascinated Ellice on the night when Hillier slept at Mafoota. Unfortunately the memory was not confined to inanimate nature—she remembered with startling distinctness every detail of that night, her husband's light tread upon the grass, his face near her own—nearer yet—until the touch of his mouth on hers seemed verily to take her sober senses with it—

She had come out here to think consecutively, but it was

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quite impossible to think. Instead, her emotions seemed to act for her, to decide what she had intended to leave to calm judgment, with the looked-for result of maintaining her decision of this afternoon. She remembered only that Hillier might grow tired of indefinite waiting—that they might drift away from each other again—that life has few chances of happiness, and here was a great possibility, not to be lightly thrust aside. Had not some definite crisis like the present forced her to say yes or no, she might have gone on dodging a decision, “indefinitely,” as he said. But some subtle note in his voice had suggested to her that the indefinite probation might not be spent within her reach—he would go away, and perhaps grow content with the waiting. Her alarmed heart suddenly challenged her to forbid such a disaster, and she heard the wings of her liberty flutter and die down in one last effort for life, even as she found herself wondering if he had taken her denial as final, and had by some means or other already left the Hotel, without further appeal—

Downstairs she could hear the voices of the tourists still raised in indistinguishable chatter. Some one was playing “Dixie”—there was a broken chorus with the inimitable American accent. A man ran up the stairs near her and disappeared hastily into a room near her own; he was only gone a minute, but as he re-emerged she came forward to meet him.

“Ellice?” he said questioningly, through the darkness and the fireflies and the mist of the moon.

“I want to tell you—” she said, and stretched her hands to him with a pitiful movement of surrender. “You needn’t wait—indefinitely!”

His answer was to take the conquered hands, and to hold them close in his, but not to attempt to draw her to him—yet.

“You will come back to me?” he said authoritatively. “When will you come?”

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"When you will!" she answered desperately, with a reckless sense of relief that the responsibility was his now. She had thrown down her defences. If was for the conqueror to step in and take possession. The fear and revolt of her honeymoon seemed an unreal fancy that had never been; when he claimed her again that would be her real bridal night.

Hillier had gently released her hands, and was leaning by her side on the verandah rail, his eyes watching the fireflies, the heart under his immaculate linen beating painfully. He had not imagined that his victory would be like this—he had taken his loves so lightly that his own earnestness was a strain to him. Furthermore, he was suddenly, at this eleventh hour, confronted with his own character as it were a ghost risen relentless out of the night. She was his, this woman who had capitulated, at his mercy, more than she had been in her torpid sense of duty when he married her. And his own desire was a stronger thing than the mere animal impulse that had possessed him then, for the ripened passion had the hurt of love to urge it. But, in a flash, he saw himself as he was—a trifle complaisant, a man saved from infidelity by anything but his own inclination, a deserter whose punishment had only arrived to him now, at the moment that should have been a crown to his manhood. For it swept over him that he was so little worthy of what he demanded of his wife that there was something sacrilegious in his very touch of her, and that past of his assumed ugly proportions in spite of its negative virtue. What beasts men were, in intention if not in fact, and—sometimes—what fools! He bent his shapely head suddenly as if the attack of his own remorse had him at too great a disadvantage for resistance.

The sudden gravity that seemed to have fallen on him reflected itself by a vague trouble in the woman at his side. It was a reaction from his usual gay manner, and even from his

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new ardour. She had offered herself as a gift, and he had not snatched at it as he had promised; it almost seemed as if he hesitated. The startled fear in her that she had played with happiness for too long, found expression in the natural appeal of his name. She said "Eric—?" as if she said "Do you not want me, then?" her humiliating doubt all in the one word. It was so frightened a protest—the weakest chirp of a bird to its mate—that it made him forget himself, and roused the nobler manhood in him to reassure and protest. He turned to her quickly, seeing her afresh by the rising moon, a white and golden woman with eyes afraid of their own tenderness, and in his face was a new revelation.

"Ellice," he said, "I have been in the Country that is called *Look Behind!*"

She did not speak, but her hands sought and twined a little closer in his, and with perfect comprehension she made a little instinctive movement as if to draw him nearer, away from his regret. His senses answered the clinging hands so swiftly that his face altered and forgot its gravity, but only his eyes caressed her.

"Are you sure?" he said unsteadily. "It is for life, remember—and I am asking for—everything."

Still her lips were closed. But the man and woman looked through each other's eyes, into each other's passion-stirred hearts. The sap had risen at last, in the human veins as much as in all the happy world around them, the pulse of whose life seemed to beat softly through the tropical night. . .

THE END

